

‘WE SHALL BE RESPECTABLE’:  
WOMEN AND REPRESENTATIONS OF RESPECTABILITY IN  
LYTTELTON 1851-1893

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the meanings and representations of respectability in Pākehā women's lives in nineteenth-century Lyttelton, New Zealand. Respectability was a form of gendered behaviour connected to ideals of appropriate femininity and women's proper place. It was one of the values on which Lyttelton was founded and respectable women had an important role from the beginning as agents of civilization. However, respectability was not solely a behavioural norm imposed on women and an examination of the forms of respectability in this growing colonial town reveals that women were active agents negotiating and contributing to definitions of respectability. The forms of respectability in Lyttelton were related to the town's character as a busy port, and the associated disorder contributed to divisions between respectable and unrespectable spaces. Women understood and represented respectability in different ways depending on their class position, social status, family responsibilities and involvement in the workforce. Not all women were able to conform to dominant norms of respectability, and others demonstrated an ambivalent commitment to ideals of respectable behaviour. The discourses of respectability in Lyttelton were complex and diverse, illustrating the anxieties and tensions of a migrant community.

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## Introduction

On 3 February 1876, 24 year-old Elizabeth Jane Harvey married William Carter at his residence in Jacksons Road, Lyttelton, New Zealand. It was not her first marriage. Elizabeth's first husband had died in April the previous year, and she had lost two children from that union. Her daughter, aged one year when they left England in 1874, had not survived the voyage to New Zealand, and a son born in Lyttelton in August 1875 survived only until December.<sup>1</sup> A photograph thought to have been taken around the time of her second marriage shows the couple standing posed unassumingly against the mundane background of a garden fence with a fallen tree stump and a mix of dirt and stones around their feet. They stand about a metre apart. Sarah's face is composed but enigmatic. She wears the archetypal garb of respectable Victorian femininity, her starched white apron a stark contrast with the dark ground. [Photograph 1]

In September that same year Sarah Buchanan was called to appear in the Lyttelton Magistrate's Court by the commission agent George McKay, over unpaid rent and 'possession of tenement', the sum in question being £14 6s 3d.<sup>2</sup> Sarah was a widow with children to support and had for some years been in straitened circumstances, gaining some income by taking in washing.<sup>3</sup> The judgment in the case went against her and she was ordered to give up possession of the property by 28 November. What happened to her in the period immediately after this is not known, but by around 1880 she had married again and a photograph from this time survives. Seated studio fashion, upright in a chair, she is dressed for the occasion, in a smart gown with lace cuffs, a shawl, gloves and with an elaborate bonnet tied under her chin. Like Elizabeth Harvey, her clothes and demeanor suggest respectable nineteenth-century womanhood. She gazes sternly from the frame. As one of her descendants puts it, 'it is a hard face, but she had a hard life.'<sup>4</sup> [Photograph 2]

We can speculate that perhaps Elizabeth and Sarah may have known each other. Lyttelton was a small town. How they felt about the blows life had dealt them is

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Challies, interview with the author, 18 July 2005. For further discussion see Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Plaint Books 1875-1877*, 21 September 1876, Lyttelton Magistrate's Court Records, Archives New Zealand, Christchurch Branch.

<sup>3</sup> Shirley McEwan, interview with the author, 7 July 2005. For further discussion see Chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

more difficult to answer. The experience of these two women was not unique. Women living in nineteenth-century Lyttelton had their share of physical toil, hardship, and experienced the loss of family members to disease or accident. However, what is unusual in these cases is that photographs of both women have survived and some knowledge of their character and circumstances is known to descendants. Both women's lives were constrained by the circumstances of marriage and widowhood. In nineteenth-century colonial New Zealand marriage, motherhood and family was the expected 'career' for women and most 'respectable' women did marry. Women's lives were governed by the limited choices available to them. How they negotiated these choices and made sense of their lives has been addressed in a plethora of ways by the explosion of scholarship in women's history that came out of the second-wave feminist movement. This study takes a feminist perspective and aims to address women's experience in Lyttelton in terms of the discourses of respectability, a subject which has not been subjected to sustained analysis in New Zealand historiography.

A central aim of women's history as first conceived was to recover the experience of women in the past, and to address the invisibility of women in the writing of traditional history; the 'hidden from history' phenomena as Sheila Rowbotham's significant early work phrased it.<sup>5</sup> This study is firmly within that tradition, and while it goes a small way towards illuminating the lives of women in Lyttelton in the nineteenth century, it does not claim to be a definitive study. While the 'recovery' of women's lives provides a context for this work, it is also influenced by trends in feminist thought that recognize the danger of generalizing the experience of all women into a universal category 'women' and instead strives for accounts that accentuate difference and diversity.<sup>6</sup> There was no one experience of respectability for women in Lyttelton and the binary of good/bad associated with discourses of respectability obscures the real complexity of women's lives. By using Lyttelton as a site to test the ideals against the reality, the categories can be deconstructed and insight gained into the underlying assumptions, beliefs, struggles and resistance that shaped women's social reality.

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<sup>5</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History. 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (London, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of debate about the essential woman subject see Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (London, 1988).





**Photograph 1.** Elizabeth and William Carter, c. 1876. Courtesy Joyce Challies.



**Photograph 2.** Sarah Buchanan, c. 1880. Courtesy Shirley McEwan.

Respectability was a particular form of gendered behaviour inseparable from ideas about women's proper place. The term 'gender' came into use in the social sciences to show how women's and men's roles are socially constructed by a given culture rather than based on biological difference. For historians the work of Joan Scott has been particularly influential, and the understanding of norms of respectability in this thesis follows her conception of gender as 'knowledge about sexual difference' and 'the social organization of sexual difference'.<sup>7</sup> Expectations about respectability in Lyttelton were a product of that particular time and place, and concerned with the meanings given to women's appropriate roles associated with ideals of womanhood.<sup>8</sup> The construction of respectability arose out of the interacting discourses of domesticity and femininity, an assumed female 'nature', and women's reproductive biology and sexuality.<sup>9</sup> A concern with respectability was ubiquitous in nineteenth-century colonial New Zealand, and was part of the cultural baggage immigrants had brought with them from Britain. However it was not an unmodified transplant of British culture to a new setting. Settler society provided opportunities for the renegotiation of norms of behaviour. Raewyn Dalziel's influential 1977 article showed how women's domestic role was emphasized in New Zealand, giving women a sense of usefulness and purpose.<sup>10</sup> Respectability as expressed in the feminine ideal of domesticity thus gained in importance. Another view, common to perceptions of frontier societies, is that colonial living allowed for a degree of 'freedom' and a relaxation of some of the constraints on women's behaviour.<sup>11</sup> An examination of discourses of respectability in Lyttelton reveals women as active agents negotiating and contributing to definitions of respectability, and I argue that respectability was not simply a behavioural norm imposed on women. Discourses of respectability in this

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<sup>7</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Welter's influential early article identified a nineteenth-century stereotype for women which she called the 'Cult of True Womanhood' based on the ideals of domesticity, piety, purity, and the home as women's proper sphere. Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860', *American Quarterly*, 18 (Summer 1966), pp. 151-174.

<sup>9</sup> Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1988), see especially Chapter 1 'The Norm: Respectable Femininity', pp. 12-47.

<sup>10</sup> Raewyn Dalziel, 'The Colonial Helpmeet: Women's Role and the Vote in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *NZJH*, 11:2 (1977), pp. 112-123.

<sup>11</sup> Erik Olssen, 'Families and the Gendering of European New Zealand in the Colonial Period, 1840-80', in *The Gendered Kiwi*, eds. Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland, 1999), p. 43. For a discussion of these various interpretations of the experience of settler women see Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald, eds. *'My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates': The unsettled lives of women in nineteenth-century New Zealand as revealed to sisters, family and friends* (Auckland, 1996), pp. 5-7.

migrant community were complex and multifaceted and illustrated the tensions and anxiety of a new society. As the expanding literature on gender and empire illustrates: '[m]igration has shared with war a capacity to reinforce contemporary gender ideologies and practices, while at the same time creating conditions for their subversion, and much of its history focuses on these tensions.'<sup>12</sup>

Discourses of respectability were in a process of transformation and articulation throughout the nineteenth century, and were affected by Lyttelton's transition from an infant colonial settlement to an established town. While it has been said that demands for social order and respectability increased in New Zealand as colonial upheaval gave way to a more settled society, in Lyttelton there was not necessarily a steady increase in concern with respectability corresponding to the growth and consolidation of the town.<sup>13</sup> While Lyttelton was a 'frontier' site, this character did not endure for long, and respectability was an integral part of the ideals and values on which the town was founded. The earliest settlers were not relaxed about the standards of behaviour for women and I argue that a commitment to, and a preoccupation with respectability were apparent from the time of arrival of the first settlers. Respectability was always important for women, but it was negotiated and expressed in different ways, depending on women's class position, occupation and individual circumstances of their lives at different times.

In representation and definition respectability is complex. A starting point for this thesis is the conviction that while the importance of respectability in the nineteenth century has not been doubted, it can too easily be considered so obvious that it needs no further consideration, with the result that its complexity is underrated.<sup>14</sup> This complexity is revealed when respectability is considered as a discourse, with a meaning always in the process of articulation rather than a fixed category, and thus a consideration of women's respectability in Lyttelton becomes an exploration of the contradictions between the 'conceptual fixity of categories and the

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<sup>12</sup> James A. Hammerton, 'Gender and Migration', in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford, 2004), pp. 156-157.

<sup>13</sup> Charlotte Macdonald, *A Woman of Good Character: Single Women as Immigrant Settlers in Nineteenth-century New Zealand* (Wellington, 1990), p. 164. Macdonald notes that respectability became more of an issue in 'better-established communities'.

<sup>14</sup> Janet McCalman was told by 'one leading English historian' when embarking on a study of working-class respectability that 'We know what respectability was, so why bother', Janet McCalman, 'Respectability and the Working Classes in Victorian London: 1850-1890', PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 1974, p. vi.

fluidity of their content'.<sup>15</sup> The nineteenth-century preoccupation with respectability reflected that it was a concept in flux; if meanings are inherently unstable then they require constant repetition and reassertion by those who would endorse them.<sup>16</sup> This study explores the contested meanings of respectability in a small town over a few significant decades in its history.

### **Lyttelton: An Introduction**

So why choose Lyttelton? In practical terms its size makes it a manageable area to focus on, while its significance as the location of the first settlement in Canterbury, and as the principal port for the province has attracted considerable attention from historians who have made much headway in telling its story. More important in my view is its situation in symbolic terms as boundary territory between old world and new, where immigrants stepped ashore and old certainties and expectations collided with the reconstructed Britishness of a colonial society still forming itself. Lyttelton was the main port of disembarkation for emigrants to Canterbury, and during the times of high immigration continually under the scrutiny of new arrivals. How this impacted on the residents' self-perception is an interesting question. A constant awareness of being under the critical gaze of newcomers could instill a self-consciousness and anxiety about the character of one's society that perhaps negated complacency. The colourful dimension of life of a port town, with its rough unsettled edge and sense of happenings, gives interest to the study of a small town and makes Lyttelton an obvious focus to address aspects of the cultural history of Canterbury. However, a local study of Lyttelton has a wider relevance. As a small town surrounded by farms, Lyttelton's population had much in common with the rest of colonial New Zealand in the late nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> While Lyttelton's story as told as a history of the development of town and province has not been neglected, its potential as a location for understanding women's place within the cultural dynamics of colonial society has yet to be exploited.

That respectability was not a quality necessarily associated with Lyttelton I was slow to realize. Some months into the research a member of the academic faculty, whose knowledge of Lyttelton was gained from growing up in one of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 2002), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Gender*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Olssen, p. 54.

neighbouring harbour communities, revealed in conversation that he had been somewhat bemused by my intention to look at respectability in Lyttelton, as it was not a quality he would have associated with the town as he knew it. I, on the other hand, had never doubted that from my research I would find a noticeable, but obviously varied, concern with respectability among women (and men) in nineteenth-century Lyttelton. It is questionable of course to apply twentieth and twenty-first century attitudes and perceptions to the character of the town in the nineteenth century. Yet this raises an important point: judgments about respectability were relative and had much to do with one's perception and where one stood both metaphorically and physically in relation to that judgment. What could be perceived to be roughness by some, might constitute respectability for others. The degree to which women could be simultaneously rough and respectable is one of the concerns of this study.

Lyttelton was founded by the Canterbury Association and was a product of ideas of systematic colonization, in which a model society was to be created, built on a strong religious foundation, suitable class divisions and an equal proportion of the sexes. The span of this study is from 1851 to 1893: from the arrival of the first of the Association settlers to the infant settlement of Lyttelton to the year New Zealand women gained the right to vote. Although the first arrivals stepped ashore in December 1850, I have chosen to begin the study in 1851, leaving the circumstances surrounding the founding of the province and the preliminary preparations of Lyttelton out of the discussion. During the forty years following, Lyttelton grew from a small settlement of a few straggling houses to a bustling port town, servicing the Canterbury province. Lyttelton was the site of numerous arrivals and although for many women it was merely the site of disembarkation, others arrived and stayed. Characterized in the first two or three years as a transit camp,<sup>18</sup> by the end of the period under study Lyttelton was a settled town.

Respectable women in Lyttelton had an important role from the beginning. Edward Gibbon Wakefield, one of the theorists behind the colonization schemes, had stressed that women were essential to the colonial project, as homemakers supporting the men in their work of production, but more important as guardians of the morality of society.<sup>19</sup> Women were thus seen as agents of civilization, and colonization was a civilizing mission, which depended on the moral purity of the women settlers. This

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<sup>18</sup> John Johnson, *The Story of Lyttelton 1849-1949* (Christchurch, 1952), p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> Dalziel, p. 113.



thesis engages with this contemporary perspective and investigates how notions of respectability impacted on the development of the town and women's role within community life.

There is a well-developed secondary literature on the history of Lyttelton. A number of local studies have focused on aspects of Lyttelton's social life and institutions,<sup>20</sup> and the town has received attention in its role as the port of the original Canterbury settlement, and hence the site of many 'firsts'.<sup>21</sup> Three unpublished theses completed in 1924, 1929 and 1941 respectively, and based on painstaking primary research, chart the early years.<sup>22</sup> To these works subsequent historians of Lyttelton owe a significant debt. *The Story of Lyttelton* by John Johnson draws heavily on the work of these theses but extends the narrative to 1949, the centenary of Lyttelton's founding, while W.H. Scotter's 1968 book concentrated on the growth of the port.<sup>23</sup> Most recently Geoffrey Rice's *Lyttelton Port and Town: An Illustrated History* explores the relationship between the port and the town, and brings the story up to the present.<sup>24</sup> However, no work has looked specifically at the historical experience of women in Lyttelton. This study hopes to shed some light on this area, but makes no broad claims for comprehensiveness. It is not a local history of Lyttelton from a women's perspective, rather Lyttelton is used as a site to investigate how women negotiated ideals of respectability in their everyday lives.

## Women's History

The first writings in women's history in the late 1960s and early 1970s, energized by the political project to effect change, were ambitious in scope, often covering long time periods, and characterized by generalizations and broad analytical

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<sup>20</sup> Jenny Betts, *The Mitre Hotel: The Story of the Oldest Hotel in Canterbury* (Lyttelton, 1999); Terry Byles, *Reston's Hotel: The History of the Lyttelton Jail* (Christchurch, 1992); Terry Byles, *Beacons on the hill: a history of St. Joseph's and St. Mary's schools, Lyttelton, 1869-1994* (Lyttelton, 1994); David Gee, *The Devil's Own Brigade: A History of the Lyttelton Gaol 1860-1920* (Wellington, 1975); Baden Norris, *Blackboards and Ships' Masts: The first hundred years of the Lyttelton Main School* (Lyttelton, 1975); Baden Norris, *United to Protect: A History of Lyttelton's Waterfront Labour* (Christchurch, 1984); J.D. Watson, *The First 100 Years: Municipal Government in Lyttelton* (Lyttelton, 1962).

<sup>21</sup> See Colin Amodeo, *The Summer Ships* (Christchurch, 2000) and Colin Amodeo, *Forgotten Forty-Niners* (Christchurch, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Millicent Kennedy, 'Lyttelton to 1876', MA thesis, University of New Zealand, 1924; Margaret Hunter, 'The History of Early Lyttelton From a Social Aspect', MA thesis, University of New Zealand, 1929; Kathleen Plowman, 'A History of the Port of Lyttelton 1848-1855', MA thesis, University of New Zealand, 1941.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson; W.H. Scotter, *A History of Port Lyttelton* (Christchurch, 1968).

<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey W. Rice, *Lyttelton: Port and Town. An Illustrated History* (Christchurch, 2004).

sweeps.<sup>25</sup> But with the development of women's history from a political to an academic movement there was a move to a more cautious approach, as a need was felt for careful, detailed work, with a nuanced focus on particular events or time periods. While the field of women's and feminist history has continued to grow in scope, the trend towards smaller areas of enquiry and more nuanced analysis has continued. Women's history in New Zealand has benefited from local studies, which have used 'a sharp focus on particular details to examine wider questions'.<sup>26</sup> This thesis continues in the local study tradition and contributes to an understanding of gendered dynamics of communities.

Questions about respectability relate to one of the oldest approaches in women's history: the metaphor of separate spheres. Historians writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s used the public/private spheres framework to write about women's confinement to the private sphere of the home where they lived in a distinct female world, dominated by nurturant activities of childrearing and family. Initially seen in terms of women's subordination, the spheres metaphor was reassessed in the 1970s and the liberating potential of a 'women's culture' based on strong emotional bonds and shared activities was stressed.<sup>27</sup> However a need was felt to break out of the oppressive/celebratory dualism of sphere versus culture, opening the way for historians to understand the degree to which the concept of separate spheres was created by and for women, and affected by and interrelated with activities of men and the 'public' sphere.<sup>28</sup> A study of respectability in Lyttelton continues in the tradition of problematizing the rhetoric of separate spheres, while recognizing the potential of recent feminist thought to give new insights into old themes. The metaphor of spheres is now seen as a discursive construction that changed in response to social and economic circumstances, informed by the interrelated strands of gender, class and

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the development of women's and feminist history see Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Caroline Daley, *Girls & Women, Men & Boys: Gender in Taradale 1886-1930* (Auckland, 1999), p. 11. See also Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law, eds. *Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890-1939* (Auckland, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Carol Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America', *Signs*, 1:11 (1975), pp. 1-29.

<sup>28</sup> Linda K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', *Journal of American History*, 75 (June 1988), p. 19. Kerber's article traces the development of the separate spheres framework, concluding: 'To continue to use the language of separate spheres is to deny the reciprocity between gender and society, and to impose a static model on dynamic relationships', p. 38. An example of the reassessment of usage of separate spheres is Dorothy O. Helly, and Susan M. Reverby, eds. *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History* (Ithaca, 1992).



race. A focus on respectability in Lyttelton shows the tensions between the prescriptive ideology of women's place and the changing realities of women's lives in a growing colonial town.

### New Zealand Women's History

This study is concerned primarily with addressing Pākehā women's agency and experience in nineteenth-century Lyttelton and thus has an explicitly women-centred focus, an approach which has been a characteristic of New Zealand women's history. While overseas trends have seen a chronological progression from a women-centred concern with recovery and celebration to questions of gender and the construction of women as a category, in New Zealand these approaches have co-existed.<sup>29</sup> Early work traced the history of feminism in New Zealand and was celebratory in style, a trend that was further stimulated by the centenary of the suffrage in 1993.<sup>30</sup> The women-centred, celebratory approach has also been evident in a strong biographical tradition.<sup>31</sup> New Zealand and Australian writing about colonial women has often been concerned with pioneer achievements, with the women concerned emerging as 'monsters of virtue', and it has been argued that '[h]istorians have thus not usually granted them the flawed humanity that goes with real respect.'<sup>32</sup> Anne Summers' influential work on colonial Australia explored the emergence of two

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<sup>29</sup> Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie, 'Introduction', in *The Gendered Kiwi*, eds. Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie, (Auckland, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Published in 1972, Patricia Grimshaw's work on New Zealand women's suffrage marked the beginning of second-wave feminist writings: Patricia Grimshaw, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand*, 2nd ed. (Auckland, 1987). See also Phillida Bunkle, 'The Origins of the Women's Movement in New Zealand: The Women's Christian Temperance Union, 1885-1895', in Phillida Bunkle and Beryl Hughes, eds. *Women in New Zealand Society* (Auckland, 1980); Dalziel, 'The Colonial Helpmeet'; Margaret Lovell-Smith, *The Woman Question: Writings by the Women who Won the Vote* (Auckland, 1992). Publications in response to the suffrage centennial include: Sandra Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of New Zealand Women Since they Won the Vote* (Auckland, 1993); Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, eds. *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (Auckland, 1994); Charlotte Macdonald, *The Vote, the Pill and the Demon Drink: A History of Feminist Writing in New Zealand, 1869-1993* (Wellington, 1993); Tania Rei, *Maori Women and the Vote* (Wellington, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> Biographical works include collections of essays and studies of individual women. Some examples include: Judith Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard* (Auckland, 1992); Charlotte Macdonald, Merimeri Penfold and Bridget Williams, eds. *The Book of New Zealand Women: Ko Kui Ma Te Kaupapa* (Wellington, 1991); Frances Porter, *Born to New Zealand: A Biography of Jane Maria Atkinson* (Wellington, 1989). The biographical approach has also been a feature of Māori women's history, see for example: Judith Binney and Gillian Chapman, *Ngā Mōrehu: The Survivors* (Auckland, 1986); Heeni Wharemaru with Mary Katherine Duffie, *Heeni: A Tainui Elder Remembers* (Auckland, 1997); Michael King, *Te Puea: A Biography* (Auckland, 1977); Micheal King, *Whina: A Biography of Whina Cooper* (Auckland, 1983).

<sup>32</sup> Miriam Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia 1788 to the Present*, 4th ed. (Sydney, 1976, 1999), p. 198.

distinct stereotypes of women: the ‘damned whores’ of the convict period and ‘God’s police’ of the mid nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Her work has had impact on the direction of studies in New Zealand, manifested in a tendency to represent women in the restrictive binary of respectable versus unrespectable, good and bad, pure and fallen.<sup>34</sup> This thesis seeks to address Pākehā women in settler society in a way that does not reduce them to one-dimensional stereotypes of ‘pioneer women’, ‘helpmeets’ or ‘magdalens’, and instead reveals the fallacy of the apparently clear division between the categories of respectable and unrespectable.

Although the biographical tradition in New Zealand women’s history has often led to a focus on elite women, working-class women’s experience has not been neglected. This thesis draws from Charlotte Macdonald’s *A Woman of Good Character: Single Women as Immigrant Settlers in Nineteenth-century New Zealand*, which aimed to rescue from obscurity the experience of single working-class women who came to New Zealand as assisted immigrants.<sup>35</sup> The work combined recovery with agency and explored women’s experience of migration in terms of their choices and motivations, and considered the aspect of women’s moral character. Ordinary women have also come to light through the productive sub-field of women and crime.<sup>36</sup> Jan Robinson explored the issue of respectability for women in nineteenth-century Canterbury through the lens of female criminality, and this study extends her project of making working-class women visible but through the lens of respectability rather than crime.<sup>37</sup> Despite the diversity of recent work it has been claimed that New Zealand women’s history ‘has not dealt well with class and ethnicity...a binary model of respectable versus non-respectable women...was adopted.’<sup>38</sup> The challenge of this thesis is to explore Lyttelton women’s understanding of their respectability in a way that gives due weight to their place in the complex web of human relationships and to

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<sup>33</sup> Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God’s Police* (Ringwood, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> Examples of this trend include: Andrée Lévesque, ‘Prescribers and Rebels: Attitudes to European Women’s Sexuality in New Zealand, 1860-1916’, in *Women in History: Essays on European Women in New Zealand*, eds. Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant (Wellington, 1986) and Margaret Tennant, “‘Magdalens and Moral Imbeciles’: Women’s Homes in Nineteenth Century New Zealand”, in *Women in History 2*, eds. Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant (Wellington, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Macdonald, *A Woman of Good Character*.

<sup>36</sup> For an overview see Charlotte Macdonald, ‘Crime and Punishment in New Zealand, 1840-1913: a Gendered History’, *NZJH*, 23:1 (1989), pp. 5-21.

<sup>37</sup> Jan Robinson, ‘Of Diverse Persons, Men Women and Whores: Women and Crime in Nineteenth Century Canterbury’, MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1983; Jan Robinson, ‘Canterbury’s Rowdy Women: Whores, Madonnas and Female Criminality’, *NZ Women’s Studies Journal* (August 1984).

<sup>38</sup> Daley and Montgomerie, ‘Introduction’, in *The Gendered Kiwi*, p. 9.

the interrelated discourses of gender, ethnicity and class. While Pākehā women remain at the centre of the narrative, this thesis recognizes that whiteness ‘is not the invisible norm but the problem to be investigated’.<sup>39</sup>

## Community

Women’s representations of respectability in Lyttelton occurred through their interactions within their community, and this thesis is a contribution to the debate on what constituted community in colonial New Zealand. Early community studies gave women a marginal role in community participation.<sup>40</sup> Miles Fairburn’s influential treatise on the colonial period argued that apart from a few settled cores, New Zealanders on the whole did not form strong communities, as scattered settlement and colonial transience prevented the formation of community bonds, resulting in an atomized society with high levels of disorder and conflict.<sup>41</sup> His work has been critiqued on a number of levels, not the least of which has been the feminist criticism that in his ‘atomized’ society, with its drunken violent men, women are left out of the picture.<sup>42</sup> A gendered approach to the issue of community has been productive. Caroline Daley’s work on the Hawke’s Bay community of Taradale between 1886 and 1930 used gender as a tool of analysis and found a strong community based on extensive kin networks.<sup>43</sup> Dean Wilson found in his study of nineteenth-century working-class Auckland that gender defined community participation, and he found more evidence of community for working-class women than for men, often represented through forms of conflict.<sup>44</sup> This thesis follows Wilson’s definition of community as ‘a shared collection of values and assumptions’, which may or may not be agreed upon and conformed to by all members of the community.<sup>45</sup> A study of women’s representations of respectability in Lyttelton contributes to our

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<sup>39</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> For example, David Pearson’s sociological study of Johnsonville addressed the themes of class and community through the issues of work, property, political participation and transience, and though women feature in the account they are on the periphery. David Pearson, *Johnsonville: Continuity and Change in a New Zealand Township* (Sydney, 1980).

<sup>41</sup> Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900* (Auckland, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> In 1991 the *NZJH* devoted an edition to the debate over the nature of community provoked by Miles Fairburn’s *The Ideal Society*. In this Fairburn answered his critics, see Miles Fairburn, ‘A Discourse on Critical Method’, *NZJH*, 25:2 (1991), pp. 158-177.

<sup>43</sup> Daley, *Girls & Women*.

<sup>44</sup> Dean Wilson, ‘Community and Gender in Victorian Auckland’, *NZJH*, 30:1 (April 1996), pp. 24-42.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

understanding of the gendered nature of community, and acknowledges the role women's everyday activities and social interactions had in defining community mores.

## Sources

The key problem of sources is that only texts produced by the respectable, largely men and the literate, remain. Alternatively, such sources as the photographs of Elizabeth Carter and Sarah Buchanan provide selective and partial views. These give a tantalizing glimpse of Lyttelton women's lives in the nineteenth century, but the limits of our knowledge of these women means the images carry with them a host of unanswerable questions. Often information on the lives of ordinary nineteenth-century women has survived only in fragments. This need not be unduly limiting. A recent collection of research on New Zealand social and cultural history has emphasized 'the fragmentary nature of what we know'.<sup>46</sup> It has celebrated the potential for understanding New Zealand culture through a variety of different approaches and attention to the 'diverse fragments of life in the past'.<sup>47</sup> This thesis likewise celebrates an eclectic approach. The concept of respectability is not readily specified, nor is it easily contained in one area of women's lives. Lyttelton women's experiences of respectability cannot be determined comprehensively from any single historical source. Hence this study has used a variety of different sources to explore the multiplicity of ways women across the class spectrum represented and experienced respectability. This approach has necessarily involved a close reading of sources and 'against the grain' analyses, for even in women's own writings their understanding of respectability was seldom stated explicitly.

Searching historical sources for meanings of respectability in nineteenth-century women's lives is thus a difficult exercise and illustrates the limits of the historian's ability to access a 'real' past. Women's history in New Zealand arose within the empirical historiographical tradition, which assumes historians can show the past how it really was. This is based on a belief that reality is a truth 'which exists and which is not dependent upon culture, history or interpretation, but forms a bedrock beneath the surface of social practice. Meaning, in this tradition, is not

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<sup>46</sup> Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum, 'Introduction' in *Fragments: New Zealand Social & Cultural History*, eds. Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum (Auckland, 2000), p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

historically determined.’<sup>48</sup> Postmodern approaches of the 1980s and 1990s challenged this certainty, and this study recognizes the problematic relationship between the evidence and the ‘experience’ it conveys. The representations of Lyttelton women in the available sources are not simple reflections of the past they inhabited. Historians, through the interpretation and meaning they apply to the evidence, create a narrative rather than revealing a true past. Thus the meaning of respectability this thesis attempts to convey is necessarily imperfect and subject to the problem of interpretation. The photographs of Elizabeth and Sarah offer clues to their lives, but no definitive interpretation is possible as the meaning the images acquire as an historical source is separate to their function in the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup>

The diverse sources used in this study, ranging from photographs to court records, illuminate and complement each other. A number of published works, such as letters and accounts of the settlement period, some written by men and some by women, have provided the background for primary research. Among other published sources used were pamphlets, street directories and census material. Of the published sources, Charlotte Godley’s collection of letters relating to the early settlement of Lyttelton and Canterbury represents the largest body of writing by a Lyttelton woman in the period of study.<sup>50</sup> Charlotte Godley arrived shortly before the first Association settlers and her position as wife of Robert Godley the Canterbury Association Agent put her in a good position to comment on the development and character of Lyttelton. However, their stay in Lyttelton was of only two years duration, and Charlotte Godley’s letters relate primarily to the small elite circle in which she moved.

A small number of letters written by Lyttelton women, mainly the more well-to-do, have survived in archive collections, and these have been read for clues as to how women felt about and expressed their respectability, and represented it to others. These were mostly written before 1880. The *Lyttelton Times* newspaper has been the most significant source in terms of the volume of material, providing documentary evidence in the shape of letters and advertisements, in addition to the reports of the proceedings of the Lyttelton Resident Magistrate’s Court. In the reports of criminal

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<sup>48</sup> Lynette Finch, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, class and surveillance* (St Leonards, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Gillian Rose argues that visual images are part of the ‘meaningful social practices’ which constitute culture, and images’ meanings comes from the many different ways they are made and used, Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London, 2001), pp. 14-16.

<sup>50</sup> John R. Godley, ed. *Letters From Early New Zealand by Charlotte Godley 1850-1853* (Christchurch, 1951).

court proceedings, transgressions of community's norms were represented and women's voices can sometimes be heard. This source has been valuable in this study for I have been unable to access the actual Criminal Records Books of the Lyttelton Magistrate's Court, which would have been the most logical source to use to identify transgressions of respectability. The Public Record Act which came into effect in March 2005, replacing the Archives Act, has meant my request to view criminal court records, which have restrictions on their access, met with delay, and access was not granted at the time of writing. However, in the place of the criminal proceedings I have found the use of the records of civil actions in the Magistrate's Court to be a productive angle for assessing women's activities in Lyttelton. The Complaint Books contain the most detailed records of proceedings, and reflect the large numbers of actions taken over debts, which was a feature of colonial New Zealand.<sup>51</sup> From 1868 onwards, the Complaint Books records are mostly complete, and appearances by women form a small but significant proportion of the whole. In addition to the more substantial bodies of source material, evidence from probates, newspaper clippings, family histories, and the card catalogue of Church records held in the Christchurch Public Library were used for piecing together the narrative. Documents of government and administration such as the Inward Correspondence of the Provincial Secretary and records of local institutions such as the Lyttelton Orphanage Committee Minute Books were also used.

Photographs, gained through contact with Lyttelton descendants, have been significant for the visual representations of culture they offer. In the nineteenth century photography offered a new form of self representation to those who could afford it, and as the century progressed the improving technology put it within reach of working people.<sup>52</sup> Nineteenth-century individuals in colonial New Zealand took advantage of photography to record meaningful representations of themselves. Photographic images could provide links between 'Home' and the colony, as pictures of children or wives or husbands were sent home to family who could never meet

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<sup>51</sup> Civil actions reflected the colony's need for protection of property and debt settlement in small trading townships, see Peter Spiller, Jeremy Finn and Richard Boast, *A New Zealand Legal History* (Wellington, 1995), p. 179.

<sup>52</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Family, Education, Photography', in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, eds. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton, 1994), p. 238.

them. Photographs were taken to mark special events, often marriages, as in the case of Elizabeth Carter and Sarah Buchanan. Respectability is only one aspect of the identity portrayed but it is significant.

Complementing and adding to the documentary sources, this study has included an oral history component, which has been useful for illuminating particular women's lives. I undertook eight interviews with descendants of nineteenth-century Lyttelton women, with the goal of gaining a more personal perspective on women's lives in Lyttelton.<sup>53</sup> The interviews fell into two types: those of elderly women drawing on memory and stories heard from older family members, and those where the informants drew on knowledge that had come mainly from their own research. However, there was some overlap between these two groups. Those informants who had researched their family history had been inspired to do so by stories passed down in the family and had wanted to know more. Some of the informants had lived all their lives in Lyttelton, and could give the valuable insiders' perspective. Another had grown up in Lyttelton but had later moved away, and the distance had enabled her to be reflective about the nature of the Lyttelton community. Anonymity was offered, but was not requested by any of the informants, either for themselves or for the subjects of their stories. In only one instance has a pseudonym been used, as the information about one particular woman was considered sensitive.

Although traditionally the professional historian and researcher of family history have stood apart, Charlotte Macdonald has noted that often information about ordinary people is known only in families, and descendants can provide unique evidence in the form of anecdote and impressions.<sup>54</sup> This study has benefited greatly from both oral traditions and the research of descendants. The informants actively entered into questioning what respectability would have been about for their great grandmothers, and enthusiastically discussed their research, speaking of the processes they had gone through, the tantalizing questions they could not answer and the gaps they could not fill. The way stories were told, and the fashion in which memories of specific women have been preserved, suggests a continuing interaction with old discourses of respectability. The tellers recognized the way the constraints of respectability affected women but refused to position the women as victims; instead

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<sup>53</sup> Oral history testimony also came from a number of interviews with elderly Lyttelton residents undertaken in 1984 with the backing of the Lyttelton Borough Council. Tapes of these interviews are held at the Lyttelton Public Library.

<sup>54</sup> Macdonald, *A Woman of Good Character*, p. 13.

they represented the virtue of struggle, and told of women who worked hard, suffered but prevailed. These accounts support the assertion that the recollections of oral history in the context of a colonial society often take the form of ‘the pioneering narrative of ordinary people succeeding in an egalitarian society.’<sup>55</sup> Anna Green cautions that although oral history is valuable for the insights it brings into how individuals make meaning of their lives, ‘sophisticated interpretive tools are required to unpack the narratives’.<sup>56</sup> However, the discourses of oral history are particularly relevant for considering the workings of respectability as oral histories can be moral stories, expressing the cultural values of communities, reflected through myths, such as the pioneering myth, and the myth of mother and helpmeet.<sup>57</sup>

### Theory and Methodology

The methodology of this study combines qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the forms and representations of respectability, but the overall approach addresses respectability as a discourse, and uses discourse analysis to explore its meaning in the lives of nineteenth-century Lyttelton women. The concept of ‘discourse’ derives from the direction of thought in the social sciences over the last few decades known as the ‘cultural’ or ‘linguistic turn’, and the body of theory known as post-structuralism, which brought new understandings of meaning, language and culture. Drawing from the work of such theorists as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and the insights of literary theory, feminist historians have focused on the construction of meanings through language, issues of ‘representation’ rather than reality, and the play of power in human relationships.<sup>58</sup>

The concept of discourses originated with Foucault, and explains culture as a site of contested meanings, a process that is always in the making and never complete. According to Foucault, knowledge and power operate together through language, a process that becomes visible through discourse.<sup>59</sup> Discourse has subsequently been

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<sup>55</sup> Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Manchester, New York, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> Anna Green, “‘Unpacking’ the Stories”, in *Remembering: Writing Oral History*, eds. Anna Green and Megan Hutching (Auckland, 2004), pp. 21-22.

<sup>57</sup> Jane Moodie, ‘The Moral World of the Waikite Valley’, in Green and Hutching, p. 57.

<sup>58</sup> See for example Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London, 1972); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London, 1977); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1976); Riley, *Am I That Name?*; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, London, 1990).

<sup>59</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, ‘Foucault for Historians’, *History Workshop*, 14 (1982), p. 111.



used and defined in various ways: it is not simply speech or language but refers to ‘the way language works to organize fields of knowledge and practice.’<sup>60</sup> It can refer to social practices as well as speech and writing and is a ‘historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs.’<sup>61</sup> The concept of discourse is an illuminating way to view respectability as it explains it as a site of shifting meanings, and allows for broad interpretations considering social structures, down to the specifics of individual women’s negotiation of the concept. Feminist historians have modified the overall focus on language by placing discourse analysis more firmly within specific historical contexts. This thesis follows the position outlined by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, that ‘if we accept the post-structuralist argument that it is language that endows the social with meaning, we must also insist that language, itself, acquires meaning and authority only within specific social and historical settings’.<sup>62</sup>

The methodology of discourse analysis is concerned with ‘a commitment to examining processes of meaning in social life’ and is characterized by ‘modesty in analytic claims, and an approach to knowledge which sees this as open rather than closed.’<sup>63</sup> Questions about the nature of respectability in Lyttelton suit this approach, for representations of women’s respectability were an integral part of social life in Lyttelton, but its meanings in women’s lives were multiple and various and not reducible to any definitive interpretation. This study explores respectability by applying specific techniques of discourse analysis to historical sources, such as questioning of obvious meanings, a close attention to common themes, to complexity and contradiction, and to the ‘invisible as well as the visible’.<sup>64</sup> This approach has included techniques of close reading, or ‘deconstruction’, a term derived from structural linguistics, but which in general usage has come to mean revealing a

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<sup>60</sup> Fran Tonkiss, ‘Analysing text and speech: content and discourse analysis’, in *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. Clive Seale (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, 2004), p. 374.

<sup>61</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, ‘Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism’, *Feminist Studies*, 14:1 (Spring 1988), p. 35.

<sup>62</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, ‘The Body Politic’, in *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Weed (New York, London, 1989), p. 101.

<sup>63</sup> Tonkiss, p. 380.

<sup>64</sup> Rose, p. 158.

concept as constructed by culture or ideology rather than a simple reflection of reality.<sup>65</sup>

The methodology also includes an understanding of gender as a category of analysis, following Joan Scott; but while gender has been used to imply that men are included in a study of women, this study's use of gender is not relational.<sup>66</sup> The emphasis in this thesis is on women's respectability, and although it includes some discussion of men's respectability, this is secondary in focus. This is not to deny that women's and men's lives in Lyttelton were interrelated, but instead reflects a choice to explore women's respectability as comprehensively as possible within the limited scope of this study. However, the aspect of Scott's definition of gender which explains it as 'a primary way of signifying relationships of power' is important in this study's understanding of respectability, as it goes some way to explaining its force and significance in women's lives.<sup>67</sup>

The boundaries used to define the Lyttelton community are somewhat fluid, and while the urban area of Lyttelton is primarily the focus, this study has not followed occupancy patterns for Lyttelton women, or family histories of residence, so it has not been possible to establish exactly where most women lived. During the nineteenth century Lyttelton was surrounded by small farms and hence there was overlap between town and country living. The women in this study are those who appear in the sources surveyed and whose activities place them in Lyttelton, whether as a resident or temporarily. The approach of this study is not biographical and it is not confined to the 'arrived and stayed' or 'born and bred' female residents of Lyttelton. No woman has been given precedence over another in the validity of her Lyttelton experience with regard to length of residence. The mobility of colonial society is evident in the port town. Sarah Buchanan left Lyttelton some time in the 1880s with her second husband, and a grandson who remained in Lyttelton had not much contact with her hereafter. She ended her days in an unmarked pauper's grave in Wellington.<sup>68</sup>

Although this study acknowledges the need for diversity in the study of women's history, and recognizes the limitations of New Zealand studies that

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<sup>65</sup> Linda Alcoff, 'Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory', in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, eds. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton, 1994), p. 120.

<sup>66</sup> Scott, *Gender*, p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>68</sup> McEwan, interview.

marginalize the experience of Māori women, it is admittedly still primarily a study of white New Zealand women. It has been said that there has been a ‘lack of dialogue’ between Māori women’s history and New Zealand women’s history generally.<sup>69</sup> Māori women are mostly invisible in the sources surveyed, indicating that Lyttelton followed the nineteenth-century pattern where Māori and Pākehā lived separate lives. However, the Māori community of Rapaki was nearby and there was some interaction between the communities, although in 1859 Rapaki’s population was recorded as just twenty-seven.<sup>70</sup> I had hoped in this study to touch on the possible impact of ideas about respectability on the lives of Māori women at Rapaki but the Lyttelton focus of the research has not been conducive to this. Further research exploring adaptations of Māori women in Canterbury in the face of the impact of the growth of the settler population on their lifestyles, identities and culture would be a revealing area of study, as would an investigation of the relationship between Rapaki and Lyttelton.

### **Thesis Structure**

Chapter 1 attempts to define respectability and considers how historians have interpreted and used the concept. It addresses how respectability was understood in terms of the particular geographic context of Lyttelton and explores the relationship between the port town’s discourses of respectability and Lyttelton women’s gendered experience of place. Chapter 2 looks at the ‘good’ women of Lyttelton and explores varied representations of respectability. Chapter 3 explores the experience of women who stood outside the discourses of respectability and looks at particular forms of transgression. Chapter 4 shows how respectability could be ambiguous, and discusses women whose social identity and behaviour came somewhere in between the categorical construction of good and bad.

This analysis of respectability in nineteenth-century Lyttelton considers it as a social process. The ways respectability was represented and experienced subjectively was in a process of constant articulation, and subject to contradiction and uncertainty, as ideas about women’s place were negotiated in the face of colonial circumstances and changing opportunities for women. Discourses of respectability adapted to

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<sup>69</sup> Angela C. Wanhalla, ‘Transgressing Boundaries: A History of the Mixed Descent Families of Maitapapa, Taieri, 1830-1940’, PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Johnson, p. 21.

legitimize women's new roles, and were reworked in a response to anxiety about social change and threatened disorder. The need for respectability was central to the divided views over the nature and development of colonial society.

## Chapter 1

### Respectability and Lyttelton

Writing in Lyttelton in November 1850, shortly before the settlers were due to arrive, Charles Torlesse bemoaned the lack of progress in roads and other public works, but nevertheless took comfort in the aspects of civilization that had already been provided for: ‘However, we shall struggle on without those advantages, and can boast of the *respectability* of the whole affair when we consider the fund that has been raised for the church and collegiate purposes, and the superior quality of the intending colonists. We may be poor, but we shall be respectable...’.<sup>1</sup>

The ideal of respectability was thus from the outset associated with the character of the initial settlement of Lyttelton, and this chapter attempts to define respectability, with particular focus on its gendered meanings and function for women. It explores how the concept took form and was understood in people’s lives in terms of particular geographic and social spaces and institutions in the town. The concept of respectability was in frequent use in nineteenth-century New Zealand indicating its importance in many people’s lives, but its precise meaning can be elusive. This thesis argues that a definitive interpretation of respectability is not possible, and although nineteenth-century individuals may have shared a generalized understanding of what constituted respectability, it could mean different things to different people and was relative to a number of factors such as social status, class, time of life, and of course gender. Historians writing about respectability have often used it loosely without acknowledging that its meanings were multiple and various. This thesis aims to unpack the concept of respectability for women in Lyttelton by analyzing it in context, within that particular geographic location and in terms of its functions in social interactions in specific circumstances of individual lives.

Attempts to define respectability are further complicated when one considers that what constituted respectability was always relative to a particular perspective. The nature of respectability in nineteenth-century Canterbury society was often conveyed through the words and perspective of an observer, usually of the male elites, and was often expressed as a quality that women were observed to possess or to lack.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Torlesse to his sister Emily Holland, 9 November 1850, in Peter Maling, ed. *The Torlesse Papers 1848-51*, 2nd ed. (Christchurch, 2003), p. 175.

This thesis is concerned with the meaning of respectability in women's own subjective identity as well as the outward expressions and representations of their respectability perceived by an observer. Women's silence in historical sources makes it more difficult to establish their understanding of respectability, but the differences of gender, class and ethnicity produced alternative world-views to those of the male elite perspective conveyed by Torlesse. Nonetheless, Torlesse's words revealed the significance of respectability to the town's founders, and demonstrated the extent to which respectability could be a particularly powerful force in the world-view of some nineteenth-century individuals. For Torlesse respectability in this instance represented security in the face of uncertainty, disappointed expectations and economic difficulties. He evoked an imagined community in Lyttelton through the concept of a shared commitment to respectability, given form in a particular place, through the moral character of its people, and enforced in respectable institutions. His meaning of respectability came from his perspective as an elite male: the 'superior quality' colonists and potential leaders he assumed were bringing respectability to Lyttelton were primarily genteel men supported by their respectable wives.

This chapter is structured in three parts: the first considers definitions and usage of respectability. It looks at aspects of the historiography of respectability relating to the British diaspora of the nineteenth century, and addresses New Zealand historians' interpretation and use of the concept of respectability. The second part gives an overview of Lyttelton's history with particular reference to the ideal of respectability as a characteristic of the town, and the tension between the maintenance of respectability through social institutions, and threats to respectability posed by disorderly public spaces and places. As a port town and a migrant community Lyttelton was a site of contested and ambiguous spaces that could be threatening or problematic for women's respectability. Women could be vulnerable in public space and there were few respectable institutions or places outside the home that respectable women could safely occupy. The last section of the chapter considers in general terms the experience of marriage for Lyttelton women, and gives a context for the overall discussion in the thesis. The patriarchal institution of marriage, and women's role therein, was synonymous with respectability and a civilized social order in New

Zealand and the British Empire.<sup>2</sup> The high marriage rates for women in colonial New Zealand were evident in Lyttelton. Marriage was the key respectable institution for nineteenth-century women. It was intended to ensure women's respectability, but as this thesis will explore, could actually be ambiguous in terms of giving or protecting women's respectability.

## Definitions

Respectability as defined by *The Oxford English Dictionary* is the state of being respectable, which means being 'worthy of notice, observation, or consideration' or 'worthy or deserving of respect by reason of some inherent quality or qualities', which could be 'by reason of moral excellence' and related to a 'decent or presentable appearance'.<sup>3</sup> What is notable about this definition is that it is taken from the perspective of the observer, and also its vagueness. Respectability in this sense is a combination of an inherent morality, unspecified, and adhering to a particular standard of appearance, and thus is the continuous interaction between one's inherent moral standing and the outward show of this inward quality. To *be* respectable one had to show it as a type of performance, and how one represented one's respectability depended on social status. Respectability in this dictionary definition is also relative to one's class position. It was about behaviour that was fitting and appropriate to one's station: respectable individuals are of 'good or fair social standing, and having the moral qualities regarded as naturally appropriate to this'.<sup>4</sup> This very general definition is relevant to both men and women in the nineteenth century but does not acknowledge that respectability was gender specific. Women's respectability in representation and subjective identity was inseparable from what was considered appropriate female roles and activities.

The gendered meaning of respectability for nineteenth-century women thus entailed a consciousness of how they appeared to others. Lynda Nead has pointed out that in etymology 'respectability' derives from the Latin *respicere*: to look back at, or regard, and notes 'the word retains the traces of this early definition in the history of its uses and particularly its nineteenth-century definition as a social or moral quality

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<sup>2</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York, 1995), pp. 36, 44-45.

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, eds. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1989), p. 734.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

rendering a person worthy of notice or observation.<sup>5</sup> Much has been made of women's subject status under the male gaze, and the fact that they could not be natural occupiers of the public realm.<sup>6</sup> Yet an examination of women's respectability shows the interaction between the apparent 'separate spheres', the public and private. Women represented their respectability by presenting themselves in public. Respectability was a form of social distinction. Women established their status through their respectability, which was expressed through adherence to a collection of moral values and core concepts based on gendered expectations relating to behaviour and appearance. However, there were different grades of respectability and not all women adhered to the same standards of behaviour. Working-class women and middle-class women could both be 'respectable' but the emphasis placed upon the standards each adhered to may have been very different.

The meaning of respectability derived from its cultural origins in Britain but was applied and adapted in the colonial setting. Core values of Victorian respectability for women were about restraint, self-regulation and self-control, shown specifically through sobriety, cleanliness, sexuality confined to marriage, thrift, self-reliance and religious observance. Women's domesticity was also central to respectability. Respectable women were good mothers and good housekeepers: they effectively controlled expenditure and managed the household and children. In the colonies, respectability for women was also related to their resourcefulness and resilience in the face of challenges and privations. However, respectability as a middle-class form was represented through behaviour that conformed to ideals of gentility represented through speech, manners and appearance, and the ideal of the lady. Working-class women's respectability depended less on standards of deportment derived from education and accomplishments but emphasized other standards which functioned as a marker of status that distinguished them from the rougher underclass of the unrespectable poor, such as the criminal and the outcast groups in society. Women's respectability was also connected to the status of their family or husband, as well as their own representations. There were thus different degrees of respectability for women, based on family connections, and how they were regarded in the

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<sup>5</sup> Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: people, streets and images in nineteenth-century London* (New Haven, 2000), p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> Griselda Pollock notes that the doctrine of separate spheres encompassed the public spaces of the modern city, and men 'moved freely between the spheres while women were supposed to occupy the domestic space alone.' Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, feminism and histories of art* (London, 1988), pp. 67-68.



community; perceptions of others were related to, but not necessarily the same as, notions of respectability in self-regard and self-perception. These complications of perspective, degree and definition meant that women's respectability could be ambiguous and this thesis addresses the contradictions between self-identifications of respectability by women who may not have demonstrated an outward conformity to dominant norms.

### **Historians and Respectability**

Historians of British culture and society have acknowledged the significance of respectability as a touchstone of social acceptability and class hierarchies; however, the emphasis given to the ideal of respectability has varied considerably. In F.M.L. Thompson's *The Rise of Respectable Society*, respectability in nineteenth-century Britain represented a number of associated and significant changes in society related to industrialism, such as decreasing family size, expanding education, and an increase in consumer spending which was itself related to widespread attempts to replicate the middle-class domestic ideal.<sup>7</sup> By 1900, in his argument, a multi-layered and more orderly social structure had developed, each group exhibiting different notions of respectability, and different living standards.<sup>8</sup> Historians have readily noted the varied representations of respectability by different classes. Geoffrey Best wrote that respectability 'came in a variety of styles' differentiated from each other 'by the strictness of their observances'.<sup>9</sup> However, the importance of gender to meanings of respectability has not always been acknowledged.

Best's definition of respectability, within an analysis of the social structure of mid Victorian Britain, is still relevant although it assumed a male subject. He acknowledged its importance as one of 'the sharpest of all lines of social division', but noted also its assimilating tendency across diverse groups.<sup>10</sup> Central to Best's definition of respectability was its relation to independence. This meant a type of self-reliance that would support a respectable standard of living, which was based on the understanding that it was immoral 'to depend on any but your own resources unless you absolutely had to'.<sup>11</sup> These ideas of self-help and self-reliance were very

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<sup>7</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society* (London, 1988), pp. 61-62.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Best, *Mid Victorian Britain 1851-1875* (London, 1971), p. 261.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 260.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

prevalent in New Zealand.<sup>12</sup> Women's respectability was often entailed in their social and economic dependence (on men), but women contributed to the independence of the self-supporting household. Women's respectability was found in their role as household managers and when women became self-supporting, whether through widowhood or other circumstances, their respectability then became connected to their degree of self-reliance, represented in their independence in not having to apply for charity.

Considerations of respectability in the colonial context have necessarily involved a focus on its cultural origins in Britain. Janet McCalman researched working-class respectability in Victorian London and afterwards brought the same concerns and interests into her work on working-class life in twentieth-century Australia. She argued that '[t]he impact of the ideals of respectability on the behaviour of all classes had been one of the most significant social transformations that came in the wake of the industrial revolution'.<sup>13</sup> She saw respectability as an economic phenomenon as notions of respectability 'derived their force' from economic realities underpinning them.<sup>14</sup> But she also acknowledged that it was 'a statement about a person's place in relationship to other members of society' and was thus about class.<sup>15</sup> McCalman, perhaps significantly, made the connection between those who espoused respectability and a readiness to emigrate. Working-class individuals (men in this instance) readily took on the ideal of respectability, as it brought psychological benefits and economic advantages; but the self-respect they gained by it was not accompanied by political or social standing in class-bound British society. Working-class 'respectables' responded by 'emigrating in droves'.<sup>16</sup>

Historians like Best have assumed that women shared in men's forms of respectability; however women's history and feminist approaches have led to considerations of respectability in studies that address gender as well as class. Emphasis has been given to the way the moral code of respectability within patriarchal society contributed to women's subordination by restricting their

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<sup>12</sup> The ideals of self-help and family responsibility were important for the lower-middle and upper-working class groups, which had a sizeable presence in New Zealand society, David Thomson, *A World Without Welfare: New Zealand's Colonial Experiment* (Auckland, 1998), pp. 20-21.

<sup>13</sup> Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: Public and Private Life in Richmond 1900-1965* (Carlton, 1984), p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> McCalman, 'Respectability and the Working Classes in Victorian London: 1850-1890', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1974, p. 53

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>16</sup> McCalman, *Struggletown*, pp. 20-21.

movements and freedoms. Philippa Levine, in her study of Victorian feminism, wrote of ‘the tightrope of respectability’ as a ‘significant handicap’ for middle-class women in the struggle to improve women’s status and opportunities.<sup>17</sup> Levine pays less attention to the importance of respectability for working-class women, writing of it as ‘a luxury that many women simply could not afford’.<sup>18</sup> Works in women’s history have rarely had an analysis of respectability as the primary focus, especially with regard to working-class women. An exception is a sociological study of twentieth-century working-class women by Beverley Skeggs who aimed to use respectability ‘as an analytical tool to bring class back into feminist and cultural theory’.<sup>19</sup> Skeggs’ definition of female respectability in the nineteenth century drew from women’s history’s public/private dichotomy and linked respectability with domesticity:

Respectability was organized around a complex set of practices and representations which defined appropriate and acceptable modes of behaviour, language and appearance; these operated as both social rules and moral codes. They impacted upon women’s use of public space whereby respectability only occurred inside the home and not in the public realm of the streets.<sup>20</sup>

This interpretation is representative of a tendency among many writers to equate women’s respectability with a passive confinement to the ‘private sphere’, an idealization not in keeping with the lot of many nineteenth-century women.

Skeggs’ definition, in a work focused on forms of working-class women’s respectability, owed much to discussions of middle-class women’s respectability, and its origins in economic and social transformations that predated the Victorian period. The nineteenth-century discourses of respectability have been linked to the formation of a new middle class in Britain, as Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall argued influentially in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*. Through a focus on domestic ideology, women were shown to be central to the articulation of a particular version of family life. At the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, the idea of ‘separate spheres’, where women’s activity was confined to the private realm of the home and areas of domestic concern, while men

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<sup>17</sup> Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900* (London, 1987), p. 85. The link between respectability and restriction for women is a recurring theme in this work, see also pp. 19, 84, 86, 129.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>19</sup> Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

acted in the public political and economic realm, was articulated and acted upon with increasing intensity. While the middle class was a diverse group, it was united by 'the commitment to an imperative moral code and the reworking of their domestic world into a proper setting for its practice.'<sup>21</sup> The eighteenth-century evangelical revival influenced this world-view, with its concern with individual salvation, and the preoccupation with moral order. Through Anglican Evangelicalism, and among Dissenters, Independents, Unitarians and Quakers a sense of religious community with similar moral causes grew, linking Christianity, godliness and the family.<sup>22</sup> 'Respectability was coming to include church going, family worship, the observance of the Sabbath, an interest in religious literature.'<sup>23</sup> Thus, the concept of respectability linked with the domestic ideal 'became a vital organising factor in the development of middle-classness, and in the creation of a differentiated class identity.'<sup>24</sup>

However, feminist discussions of respectability have moved beyond seeing women's respectability as a simple reflection of the public/private dichotomy. While it can be argued that nineteenth-century women 'were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm',<sup>25</sup> Lynda Nead has argued for a more complex understanding of the public sphere and women's use of public space.<sup>26</sup> Nead addressed discourses of respectability in terms of modernity and the new public spaces of the city streets in 1860s London, where the presence of young respectable middle-class women 'tested and expanded contemporary definitions of femininity and respectability'.<sup>27</sup> She suggests that 'respectability itself embraced a range of attitudes to the public domain'.<sup>28</sup> This reassessment of women's respectability, considering women's public activities in the context of changing times and associated uncertainties, gives women agency in the representations of respectability rather than showing them as passive subjects of a repressive moral code.

Despite the recognition of women's agency in the articulation of respectability, the concept has been perceived in negative terms. Respectability has

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<sup>21</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, Revised ed. (London, 2002), p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The regulation of sexuality since 1800*, Revised ed. (London, 1989), p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, p. 71.

<sup>26</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, pp. 62-73.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

been associated with all that was worst in Victorian society. As Best wrote, being respectable meant essentially ‘maintaining a respectable front’ which encouraged charges of ‘Victorian hypocrisy’.<sup>29</sup> For working people the respectable front was maintained at considerable psychological cost, and entailed a high degree of self-restraint and self-control, a battle that continued in the colonies. The psychological strain of the respectable front may have been worse in New Zealand, for the rewards of respectability, such as social mobility and economic success, were assumed to be higher. Hence, if respectability did not lead to success, the sense of failure could have been more keenly felt.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, the lessening of social pressures associated with a migrant community may have made a respectable front less important. Whether this was the case for both men and women is unclear. Women’s gendered position as society’s moral guardians made it more likely that respectability was seen by them as an inescapable duty. Negative connotations of respectability continue to colour perceptions of women’s lot in the nineteenth century. Naomi Wolf wrote of respectability as a repressive code and a straitjacket of constraint for women. She thought an ‘obsession with rigid norms of respectability’ prevented colonial women from forging new identities in the frontier.<sup>31</sup>

However, recent postcolonial scholarship has addressed respectability in ways that highlight its complexity. Such studies feature nuanced approaches that consider its meanings and representations in terms of gender, class and race, and include a focus on perspective of definitions of respectabilities, and the possibilities of multiple viewpoints. Malathi de Alwis considered respectability within the framework of ‘colonial modernity’ in Ceylon and argued that respectability was ‘re-made’ in the colonial context.<sup>32</sup> Different perceptions of respectability were appropriated by the indigenous people, and “‘respectability’” was produced in the articulation between Christian and indigenous notions of morality and proper conduct’.<sup>33</sup> While the

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<sup>29</sup> Best, p. 261.

<sup>30</sup> A disillusioned woman who arrived in Canterbury in the 1880s wrote reflectively of the plight of unsuccessful settlers: ‘They may probably think it must be there own fault if they do not succeed’ for New Zealand was ‘highly cracked-up at home’, “‘Hopeful’”, “‘Taken In’” *Being, A Sketch of New Zealand Life* (London, 1887, Christchurch, 1974), p. 143.

<sup>31</sup> Naomi Wolf, *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How it Will Change the 21st Century* (London, 1993), pp. 181-182, 190.

<sup>32</sup> Malathi de Alwis, “‘Respectability’”, “‘modernity’” and the policing of “‘culture’” in colonial Ceylon’, in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*, ed. Antoinette Burton (London, 1999), p. 177. The author looks at the Sinhala concept of *lajja-baya* (shame-fear) which has parallels to European notions of respectability.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

colonizers intended the ‘heathen’ bodies of the native women to be made ‘respectable’ in the mission schools, the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists criticized indigenous women who were seen to be too Christian and ‘modern’ for the ‘unrespectable’ habits and manners acquired from these schools. The nationalists claimed, for example, that Sinhala women were losing their ‘respectability’ by taking on western dress.<sup>34</sup>

Multiple viewpoints and different perspectives on respectability are addressed in Emma Liggins’ investigation of work culture and respectability of working-class women at the end of the nineteenth century as seen through the perspective of middle-class commentators.<sup>35</sup> She used the new narratives created by the reports of social investigators and novels focusing on the factory worker, and uncovered varying, sometimes contradictory and ambiguous, representations of respectability. As in Malathi de Alwis’s account of Ceylon, respectability is discussed from the perspective of the observer, while the women themselves remain voiceless. Similar themes are addressed in Alecia P. Long’s work on post-slavery New Orleans, where, she argues, ideas about female respectability were in flux, affected by women’s new occupation of public spaces.<sup>36</sup> Meanings of respectability were formed in opposition and relation to the city’s burgeoning discourses of decadence, indulgence and sexuality across racial lines. Long considers the contrasting perspectives of respectability in terms of gender and class, and concluded ‘requirements for respectability were much less stringent for men than they were for women’.<sup>37</sup>

### **New Zealand Historiographies of Respectability**

In New Zealand historiography, as in overseas scholarship, treatment of respectability has been uneven and has followed no particular pattern. The concept of respectability has been considered in the study of Pākehā culture but it has not often been placed at the centre of the narrative. Contrasting usages have seen respectability considered broadly and loosely, as well as in terms of gender and class, although most often historians have used the concept without defining it, or acknowledging the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 179-183.

<sup>35</sup> Emma Liggins, “‘Women of True Respectability?’” Investigating the London Work-girl, 1880-1900’, in *Women and Work Culture: Britain c. 1850-1950*, eds. Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 89-106.

<sup>36</sup> Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge, 2004), pp. 67-69, 76, 88-89, 96.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

perspective of the judgment. Most often it has been equated with domesticity: the domesticity or otherwise of New Zealand women has been a matter of debate since Raewyn Dalziel's influential article on the 'colonial helpmeet'. Moreover, the concept of respectability for women (and men) has been tied to the commitment to the patriarchal family form, and the ideal of home and land ownership. Recently Philippa Mein Smith wrote that '[t]he ideal was male-centred but also family-centred, built on skilled working-class values of respectability; of separate spheres for men and women, thrift, sobriety and security.'<sup>38</sup> The forms of respectability in New Zealand have been an element in discussions of domesticity and the family: the assumption has been that in New Zealand colonial society a respectable woman was a married woman engaged in domestic tasks. Erik Olssen wrote that the missionaries as well as systematic colonizers 'accepted the centrality of the conjugal family to civilized society' and he argued that of those recruited by the systematic colonizers, a large number wanted 'to maintain the family, under the husband-father's authority, as a productive economic enterprise'.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, historians have also recognized the lessening of the constraints of respectability and possibilities of emancipation offered by a frontier society. Olssen noted '[c]olonial freedom fostered greater independence and weakened British beliefs about gender.'<sup>40</sup> There is considerable evidence for this view, but it is mostly drawn from the writings of a few middle-class women, showing that the ideas of genteel feminine behaviour had to be adapted to colonial circumstances, in which some women rejoiced in the physical freedoms or domestic challenges that gave them a sense of usefulness and purpose.<sup>41</sup> One such is Jane Maria Atkinson who wrote convincingly of her own personal redefinition of respectability in 1853:

I am afraid I have the soul of a maid of all work, and whether I shall ever be anything better seems doubtful. Lely [mother] seems rather disgusted at seeing me scrub about and look dirty as I do when at dirty work, but I consider myself a much more respectable character than I

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<sup>38</sup> Philippa Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 101.

<sup>39</sup> Erik Olssen, 'Families and the Gendering of European New Zealand in the Colonial Period, 1840-80', in *The Gendered Kiwi*, eds. Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland, 1999), pp. 40-41.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> See for example Frances Porter, *Born to New Zealand: A Biography of Jane Maria Atkinson* (Wellington, 1989); Lady Barker, *Station Life in New Zealand* (Auckland, 1973), first published 1870.

was when I was a fine lady, did nothing for anybody but made a great many people do things for me.<sup>42</sup>

James Belich has taken from Jane Maria Atkinson's writings that middle-class women in colonial New Zealand could be caught in a tension between a 'model of idealised British feminine gentility' and a 'model of colonial genteel respectability, or respectable gentility'.<sup>43</sup> Belich argues that Jane Maria Atkinson 'who fully espoused the colonial compromise, may also have been exceptional in her preference for respectability over gentility'.<sup>44</sup> He used the label of respectability in his history of New Zealand as a badge of class distinction. He placed the 'genteel' above the 'respectable' in the social structure and the 'decent' and 'disreputable' groups below them, although he does allow for various 'tiers' of middle-class respectability.<sup>45</sup> Belich's use of respectability and gentility as class labels is perhaps too simplistic; it does not acknowledge the degree to which they were interrelated. Gentility could be an elite-laden term for respectability; by claiming an enhanced respectability Jane Maria Atkinson was not denying her gentility.

The issue of respectability for working-class women is a significant aspect of Charlotte Macdonald's study of the young single women who emigrated to New Zealand as government assisted migrants.<sup>46</sup> They were recruited to meet the demand for domestic servants and to remedy the imbalance of the sexes, and those chosen were required to be 'sober, industrious and of good moral character'.<sup>47</sup> Respectability in this study is considered from the perspective of authorities and elites, and the work reveals that New Zealand settler society could be highly critical of the character of working-class women migrants. Single working-class women were subjected to closer scrutiny than any other groups of immigrants, due to a sense that any women who

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<sup>42</sup> Jane Maria Atkinson to Margaret Taylor, 11 November 1853, in 'My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates': *The unsettled lives of women in nineteenth-century New Zealand as revealed to sisters, family and friends*, eds. Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald (Auckland, 1996), p. 160.

<sup>43</sup> James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of New Zealanders From Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland, 1996), p. 390.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 381, 397.

<sup>46</sup> Charlotte Macdonald, *A Woman of Good Character: Single Women as Immigrant Settlers in Nineteenth-century New Zealand* (Wellington, 1990).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.



were willing to travel alone to the colonies were likely to be of dubious character.<sup>48</sup> Despite the requirement that the recruiting officers should select only respectable women, the study showed that, if judged by their subsequent behaviour, some disreputable women were chosen.<sup>49</sup> This highlights the complexity of representations of, and attitudes to, women's respectability in the nineteenth century. Middle-class commentators, while suspicious of the inherent respectability of working-class women, were caught between a conviction that respectability must and should be unambiguous, and the reality that working-class women could easily assume an appearance of respectability that tallied with middle-class expectations.

With the increase in gendered studies in New Zealand historiography, the differences between men and women's respectability have been considered, and working-class forms of respectability have been addressed. Karen Duder examined the response of skilled working-class women to the ideologies of respectability and domesticity in New Zealand between 1900 and 1940. Using the concept of hegemony Duder argued that women had diverse responses to, and interpretations of, the precepts of respectability.<sup>50</sup> Claire Toynbee used oral interviews to investigate work and the varied means by which men, women and children gained a livelihood, as members of families and communities in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>51</sup> She writes of respectability in gendered terms: among the working class and lower middle class there was an association between respectability, being a 'good father', and keeping a vegetable garden. Respectability could be equated with self-sufficiency for women, who used their domestic skills to save money, by remaking garments for example.<sup>52</sup> Respectability in Toynbee's work, is more easily equated with 'respectable family men' where men's responsibility for their family included women's economic dependence. However, some women demanded a new degree of familial responsibility from men. 'The working-class men who accepted this kind of

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17. As Charlotte Godley wrote: 'Every tolerably respectable woman has a husband and children, and does not wish to leave home.' Charlotte Godley to her mother Mrs Wynne, 12 June 1850, in John R. Godley, ed. *Letters From Early New Zealand by Charlotte Godley 1850-1853* (Christchurch, 1951), p. 56.

<sup>49</sup> Macdonald, *A Woman of Good Character*, pp. 91-93, 107, Chapter 7.

<sup>50</sup> Karen Duder, 'Hegemony or Resistance? The Women of the Skilled Working Class and the Ideologies of Domesticity and Respectability', MA thesis, University of Otago, 1992.

<sup>51</sup> Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His: Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930* (Wellington, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

responsibility may also have accepted their new role as a price to be paid for successful claims to status and respectability, indeed as “respectable family men”.<sup>53</sup>

Caroline Daley’s study of Taradale found women earned respectability through their domestic labours, and through their leisure, by using crafts and good works to establish status; by the 1890s, ideas of respectability were being renegotiated and redefined.<sup>54</sup> Women’s entry into paid work, their use of cosmetics and adoption of new fashions, their involvement in sports, cycling and masculine leisure activities, and the associated movement into public spaces meant that they ‘were redefining Taradale’s gender boundaries’.<sup>55</sup> Women were less likely to be focused on domesticity to the exclusion of all else and within a generation ‘[r]espectable feminine behaviour was experiencing a minor redefinition.’<sup>56</sup> These negotiations of respectability are addressed in *Sites of Gender*, which showed that the ‘New Women’ of the 1890s took advantage of new freedoms, but were still concerned with keeping their respectability.<sup>57</sup>

Limited attention has been paid to the meanings and representations of respectability among different groups in society, and particularly with regard to race and ethnicity. A notable absence has been considerations of discourses of respectability in the lives of Māori women in the cultural transformations of the nineteenth century. Māori women may have taken on Christianity and European dress but these outward displays did not necessarily render them ‘respectable’ in Pākehā eyes, and reveal nothing about how the drive for respectability may have been interpreted by them in life within Māori communities.

### **Lyttelton and Respectability**

Lyttelton was founded on high ideals and, as Charles Torlesse’s statement illustrated, was perceived initially to be a highly respectable community in the making. A product of Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s ideas of ‘systematic colonisation’ put into action by the Canterbury Association, formed in 1848, and supported by

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>54</sup> Caroline Daley, *Girls & Women, Men & Boys: Gender in Taradale 1886-1930* (Auckland, 1999), pp. 47, 113-114.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 127, 126-131.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>57</sup> Barbara Brookes, Erik Olssen and Emma Beer, ‘Spare Time? Leisure, Gender and Modernity’ in *Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890-1939*, eds. Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law (Auckland, 2003), pp. 165.

many prominent figures in politics and the clergy in England, Lyttelton was to be the port of a model Church of England settlement made up of a cross section of English society, but without old world ills. The Canterbury Association settlers who arrived in Lyttelton in 1851 were thus part of an idealistic scheme whereby a particularly good class of settler would forge a model society. The presence of sufficient numbers of women was essential to this project, and optimistic predictions of the moral and pious character of that new society were soon made. After attending a church service in Lyttelton in December 1850, shortly after the arrival of the first four ships, Charles Torlesse was ‘much gratified’ with the proceedings and ‘struck with the respectable tone of the whole thing which I pray God may realize our most sanguine expectations’.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, early in 1851, at the occasion of the Lord Bishop of New Zealand’s confirmation of twelve children in the temporary church at Lyttelton, the *Lyttelton Times* reported: ‘A spirit of deep earnestness seemed to pervade the whole assembly; and furnished the omen, that our Church settlement is hereafter to be home of a religious and high-minded community.’<sup>59</sup>

However, Lyttelton was essentially a port town, and as such, could claim only an uneasy respectability as the century progressed. Although it enjoyed importance initially as the first settlement and the place of arrival, this precedence did not last. Named after the 4<sup>th</sup> Baron Lyttelton, the name had been originally intended to be bestowed on the capital of the settlement, but in that respect one could say that Lyttelton was doomed at the outset by its geography. Situated on the northern side of the natural harbour, within the old volcanic landscape of Banks Peninsula, high hills separated it from the plains, and the future site of the capital Christchurch. Early settlers were troubled by the winds and the dust, and considering allotments of land for the first colonists Charles Torlesse wrote: ‘It is so disagreeable a place to live in that I consider few or none will be valuable for mere residence.’<sup>60</sup> The available land was limited, most sections were on a steep gradient, and an adequate water supply was a persistent problem. Attitudes towards Lyttelton’s desirability as a place of abode were mixed, and while its picturesque location could be appreciated, a succession of arrivals found the surrounding high hills unpleasant at best and distinctly menacing at worst, as in the words of a decidedly unappreciative woman:

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Torlesse to his mother Catherine Torlesse, 22 December 1850, Maling, p. 185.

<sup>59</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 1 March 1851, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Torlesse to his father Charles Martin Torlesse, 12 February 1851, Maling, p. 195.

‘all round the same black, forbidding looking upheavals met the eye and enclosed the Port’.<sup>61</sup> While the model English community envisaged by the founders was pursued more successfully in Christchurch with the key institutions of Cathedral and College, and a setting more conducive to the desired civilized suburban dwellings,<sup>62</sup> in Lyttelton the activities of the port and the rougher side of commercial shipping soon made its presence felt and had impact on the perceived respectability of the town.

In its early stages Lyttelton was a frontier site with the associated unsettled and chaotic organization of public space. In 1851 there were not clearly defined respectable and unrespectable spaces in Lyttelton, and its small size meant that the activities of the port, the domestic residences, and businesses overlapped. The first settlers arrived to a scene of activity; a large jetty had been built and the principal streets had been laid out. The preparation of the site of the town had begun in 1849 and a resident population of around 300 greeted the Canterbury Association settlers when they arrived.<sup>63</sup> With the arrival of the first four ships at the end of 1850 the population rapidly increased to over a thousand, overflowing the immigration barracks that had been built to receive them. In 1851 Lyttelton was ‘a curious-looking place, but had a business-like air about it, although the dwellings, &c., on the hillside mostly consisted of huts, a few rough shanties, and tents.’<sup>64</sup> Although the site of the town was on a steep slope, intersected by gullies, the initial streets were imposed on it in a grid system. The street extending along the waterfront was named Norwich Quay, and one block up the hill parallel to it was London Street, with Winchester Street beyond that. Intersecting these at right angles were, from left to right, Dublin Street, Canterbury Street and Oxford Street, the latter running directly up from the jetty. These became the main streets of the town. A number of houses, a store and public house were already in existence. The most notable dwelling was the house built for John Robert Godley the Canterbury Association Agent, his wife Charlotte Godley and their son Arthur. As more residential dwellings were built women were able to

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<sup>61</sup> “Hopeful”, “Taken In;” *Being, A Sketch of New Zealand Life* (London, 1887, Christchurch, 1974), p. 70.

<sup>62</sup> John Cookson, ‘Pilgrims’ Progress – Image, Identity and Myth in Christchurch’, in *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography 1850-2000*, eds. John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall (Christchurch, 2000), pp.15-16; Trevor Burnard, ‘An Artisanal Town – The Economic Sinews of Christchurch’, in Cookson and Dunstall, pp. 117-118.

<sup>63</sup> For an account of those who paved the way for the Canterbury Association settlers see Colin Amodeo, *Forgotten Forty-Niners* (Christchurch, 2003)

<sup>64</sup> M.H.A.B., *A Pilgrim in the Nineteenth Century; or A Sketch in the Early Days of Canterbury, New Zealand* (London, 1893), p. 77.

actively create and mark out respectable spaces against the more ambiguous public space.

However, one of the main characteristics of Lyttelton, from the beginning and as it developed over the century, was the extent to which its public spaces were male dominated. Large numbers of visiting ships meant that numerous seamen had a very visible presence in the town. Challenges to respectability in Lyttelton were from the beginning associated with the activities of the port. During the 1850s the volume of shipping arriving in Lyttelton increased and with it the numbers of visiting seamen. Discourses of the danger and threat to respectable women posed by them were current from the 1850s and continued into the twentieth century. As early as 1851 a letter to the editor expressed disgust at the nuisance drunken men posed to passing women:

I allude to the numbers of half drunken men that are continually to be met with at the corner of Oxford Street, by the Canterbury Hotel. The evidence this affords of the prevalence of this particular vice is sad, but at any rate, let those who practise it be prevented from not merely blocking up a public footpath, but in such a manner that frequently even ladies cannot pass without being subjected to insult and annoyance. Surely something may be done to put a stop to this.<sup>65</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, the perception was that visiting seamen, who may or may not have been rough and unruly, made the streets dangerous places for respectable women. Some streets were perceived to be more respectable than others, and those in closer proximity to the port were potentially less respectable than the primarily residential streets further up the hill. Norwich Quay on the waterfront developed as a particularly definite male enclave, but women could well have reason to have to go there; the new post office which opened in 1876, was on the corner of Norwich Quay and Oxford Street, a similar location to the site of the perceived nuisance in 1851. Thirty years after the first complaints another remarkably similar letter to the paper showed the same situation. As there was no proper shipping office where seamen could congregate, increasing trade had led to seamen gathering in front of government buildings, the post office and customs house, waiting to ship or be discharged:

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<sup>65</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 29 November 1851, p. 6.

this is a source of great annoyance to those who have business to transact at any of the Government offices, as often it is necessary to absolutely force a passage through the crowd of men assembled, who seem to regard the place as one where they have a perfect right to do as they like. To ladies who have business at the Post or Telegraph offices this state of things is highly objectionable, as the remarks made at times are not of the choicest kind...<sup>66</sup>

Lyttelton grew rapidly and as a nascent community of migrants, respectability, or at least the respectable front, may have been important. In 1851 over 3000 settlers arrived in Lyttelton, but the next large influx was not until 1859.<sup>67</sup> Most of those arriving passed through, but a settled core remained. In 1856 the population was 800 and growing rapidly. Lyttelton had 'the appearance of a bustling small port town'.<sup>68</sup> Isolated from growing settlement of Christchurch by the barrier of the port hills, Lyttelton maintained its own distinct character. Transport and access to the plains was difficult, and initially the Bridle Path, a steep track cut on the spur above the town and meant as a temporary solution, remained for some years the main walking track to the plains. However, the rail tunnel through the port hills to Christchurch was completed by 1867. It ensured the continuing importance of the port, and at the same time made Lyttelton in effect a suburb of Christchurch.<sup>69</sup> The population increased steadily to a high point in mid 1881 of around 4000, then decreased slightly before steadying at a little over 3,500 for several of the decades following. Significantly, between 1868 and 1878 the population had more than doubled - a rate of growth, as Geoffrey Rice notes, only matched in gold rush towns.<sup>70</sup> Even Lyttelton's great fire of 1870, though causing significant financial losses and destroying homes and livelihoods, did not halt the general population increase. The fire destroyed the central business district, including six hotels and many shops and houses.<sup>71</sup>

Lyttelton business catered for the needs of the port and contributed to the character of the town. Hotels were important from the beginning, providing accommodation, and a range of essential services. The Mitre, Lyttelton Arms, and the Canterbury Hotel were all established in the first year. By 1870 there had been about sixteen or seventeen hotels. Though initially in various locations and particularly on London Street, towards the end of the century they were concentrated in the upper

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1 May 1880, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Geoffrey W. Rice, *Lyttelton: Port and Town. An Illustrated History* (Christchurch, 2004), p. 22.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Waitt to Joseph Thomas, June 1856, Maling, p. 231.

<sup>69</sup> Rice, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

side of Norwich Quay.<sup>72</sup> Some, such as the Canterbury Family Hotel, were more respectable than others.<sup>73</sup> While hotels provided respectable meeting places for men, respectable women could not frequent them. Yet hotels were also homes and workplaces for some women and as such represented an ambiguous blurring of public and private in contrast to the discourses of threatening male-dominated public spaces in Lyttelton.

Of significance to the town's ambience was the Lyttelton Gaol, an imposing stone building, which opened in 1861. It occupied a prominent position on Oxford Street and represented in tangible form the physical separation of unrespectable and respectable space. The gaol became one of the largest in New Zealand, and its Hard Labour Gang contributed to the town by building retaining stone walls and breakwaters. Residents became used to the road gangs and they became part of the scenery of the town.<sup>74</sup> No doubt the visible presence of convicts also served to constantly remind residents of the fate awaiting those who failed to meet norms of respectability. The sense of tangible threat to respectability may have been greater for women as the prisoners were known to watch and whistle at passing females.<sup>75</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed Lyttelton was perhaps less likely to be perceived by outsiders as a respectable place, but whether justifiably so or not is unclear. Although numbers of 'respectable' individuals had their homes and workplaces there, with increasing numbers of ships calling there in the 1860s and 1870s and the growth of the port, Lyttelton became more noticeably a commercial and functional transport hub rather than a site of civilized genteel refinement.<sup>76</sup> In the 1850s Lyttelton had been more significant in economic terms than Christchurch, with the first bank, post office, customs house, and hospital, and with the money that came into the port by way of the crews of large cargo vessels who had to wait for the ship to be unloaded.<sup>77</sup> However, the increasing dominance of Christchurch meant Lyttelton lost its status as principal town, and the Chamber of Commerce, the Customs House and *Lyttelton Times* among other businesses moved to Christchurch in the 1860s.<sup>78</sup> By

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<sup>72</sup> Margaret Hunter, 'The History of Early Lyttelton From a Social Aspect', MA thesis, University of New Zealand, 1929, p. 187.

<sup>73</sup> Rice, p. 26.

<sup>74</sup> David Gee, *The Devil's Own Brigade: A History of the Lyttelton Gaol 1860-1920* (Wellington, 1975), p. 18.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Rice, p. 43, John Johnson, *The Story of Lyttelton 1849-1949* (Christchurch, 1952), p. 89.

<sup>77</sup> Rice, pp. 24-25.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 43, Johnson, p. 89.

the end of the century Lyttelton was perhaps a town of solid citizens rather than of genteel pretension. As Johnson wrote: 'In 1876, there were neither any slums, nor any distinguished aristocracy. Any who had wished to be regarded in the latter class had as a rule moved on to Christchurch, which could offer the kind of festivities the rich patronise.'<sup>79</sup> Johnson also noted that Lyttelton had the great fire to thank for ridding it of its slums.<sup>80</sup> Thus socially, Lyttelton was mainly a town of working people. The elite women of Lyttelton were middle-class wives, daughters and sisters of town officials, lawyers, doctors, merchants and clergy. Lyttelton was a close-knit town and working people, among them the waterside workers known as 'lumpers', could be near neighbours with their bosses. However, the town was not necessarily welcoming of outsiders and 'Maori were usually conspicuous by their absence'.<sup>81</sup> By 1891 Lyttelton had two Chinese residents; oral tradition suggests that their presence was not accepted happily.<sup>82</sup>

Lyttelton residents demonstrated and attempted to maintain respectability through institutions which served to define and create respectable spaces. For women the churches were the most significant, as religious observance was a way of demonstrating respectability, and the church represented a respectable meeting place for women outside the home. Religious observance began early in Lyttelton, although church building had not begun by the time the first four ships arrived. The first Sunday after their arrival church services were held among barrels and rope in a warehouse on Norwich Quay, and Anglican services became a regular feature thereafter, although in the temporary location of one of the immigration barracks.<sup>83</sup> The first Anglican Church was the Holy Trinity, which opened on the junction of Canterbury and Winchester Streets in April 1852. However shortcomings in its building and the warping of timbers meant the structure became unsafe and had to be abandoned by the end of 1853. Worship continued in the barracks until a new church was built and consecrated finally in 1860.

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<sup>79</sup> Johnson, pp. 96-97.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>81</sup> Rice, p. 48.

<sup>82</sup> *Census of New Zealand 1891*. Reminiscences of early twentieth century Lyttelton tell of the bullying an old Chinese man was subjected to by local boys. Mrs Gilmore, interviewed in Lyttelton, 5 December 1984, Myrtle Large, interviewed in Lyttelton, 10 December 1984, tapes held at Lyttelton Public Library.

<sup>83</sup> Hunter, pp. 102-103, 117-118.



In similar fashion to the eventual concentration of hotels in Norwich Quay, the churches in Lyttelton came to be established in one location, on Winchester Street, suggesting that a shared Christianity was a unifying force over and above denominational difference. Despite the Canterbury Association's intention of a purely English Church settlement, other religious denominations were present in Lyttelton from the beginning. Presbyterians were among the early settlers, and a number of Wesleyan Methodists arrived in the early 1850s; they had built their first church by 1855, and eventually established their church in Winchester Street in 1866.<sup>84</sup> Two doors away was the Presbyterian Church, built in 1864, and opposite the Anglican Church was St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, finished in 1865.<sup>85</sup> An explanation given for building the churches in the same street was that it was the next main thoroughfare not already filled with business premises.<sup>86</sup> Whether to do with the practicalities of available sections or not the close proximity of churches suggests the tendency of Lyttelton's inhabitants to actively attempt to separate respectable and unrespectable spaces and hence create some distance, in real terms and psychologically, from the potentially threatening port.

Among other institutions that potentially offered a respectable public space open to women was the Colonist's Hall, which replaced the old town hall in 1865, and provided a library, committee and reading rooms, and a concert hall.<sup>87</sup> Though Lyttelton's large number of friendly societies and lodges provided respectable meeting places for men, women had no equivalent institution. Through membership of these, working men could bolster their respectability, and enhance their status. The lodges were in various locations, the Freemason's lodge first met in Lyttelton in 1851 and in 1876 had premises on St Davids Street, while other lodges were situated in Canterbury and Winchester Streets.<sup>88</sup>

### **Women, Respectability and Space in Lyttelton**

Women in colonial Lyttelton were in an ambiguous position. Simultaneously they could be perceived as victims of the disorder and male threat associated with the port, while their presence was also meant to ensure the community's respectability or

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<sup>84</sup> Rice, p. 23.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>86</sup> Hunter, pp. 154-155.

<sup>87</sup> Rice, p. 32.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

at least keep the worst of men's excesses at bay. Women's representations of respectability are central to questions of how they negotiated life in a port town. While residence there may have complicated performances of respectability, it is necessarily difficult to assess how individual women experienced Lyttelton's ambiguous public spaces. Feminist geographers have shown that experience of place is gender specific, with gender divisions and perceived spatial divisions, such as the public/private divide, reinforcing each other. They argue for an understanding of place as not a fixed geographic location, but as an uncertain site created through power relations and social practices which define the rules and boundaries to be observed there.<sup>89</sup> The often compromising context of Lyttelton's public spaces potentially made it difficult for women to maintain respectability in public and there were few public institutions, apart from the churches, through which women could safely represent their respectability. Respectability for women was defined by expectations of behaviour in various sites, be they workplaces, streets or homes, and the difficulties for Lyttelton women representing their respectability in public demonstrated how 'men and women could inhabit separate moral territories even while sharing the same physical space'.<sup>90</sup> Women had to be careful of their manner when in public, for by mixing too freely in public spaces they risked their respectability.<sup>91</sup>

Women's family ties and social status determined their place and role in Lyttelton, and their degree of public visibility. Despite the attraction of the plains for many of the arriving settlers, some immigrants chose to stay in Lyttelton, as the potential for business created by the port was significant. Women stayed if their husbands or fathers stayed, but single women and widows also worked in the town. From the beginning women attempted to create respectable spaces, which was primarily done by making homes and thus helping to 'civilize' the moral wilderness. However, the historical evidence that can be drawn on for this interpretation is generally from a middle-class perspective. In 1851, respectability for middle-class

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<sup>89</sup> Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 4, 12.

<sup>90</sup> Clare Wright, *Beyond the Ladies Lounge: Australia's Female Publicans* (Carlton, 2003), p. 190.

<sup>91</sup> For a discussion of women's occupation of compromising public spaces see Long, *Southern Babylon*. Long wrote of the concern felt that women who frequented the public spaces adjacent to New Orleans' concert saloons risked being taken for 'public women'. The social geography of late nineteenth-century New Orleans was becoming more complicated, a time when women of all classes were moving more freely in public, and styles of dress made it more difficult to distinguish disreputable from respectable women, pp. 67-69, 76, 88-89.

women in Lyttelton took the form of keeping one's refinement despite the rough conditions. Letters from women in Lyttelton in 1851 reported on their efforts at 'making do' in the chaos of the early settlement. Georgiana Elizabeth Bowen's correspondence home reported on their living conditions in the crowded immigration barracks, 'in the midst of dust and confusion of all kinds'.<sup>92</sup> Women had to contend with living in unfinished buildings, or in tents, cooking and washing in the open, and dealing with dust and mud alternatively and the vagaries of the New Zealand weather.<sup>93</sup> How women created their domestic space depended on their class position and the means available to them. By the end of 1851 homes were well established and material comforts were appearing, such as imported furniture and pianos.<sup>94</sup> By creating a domestic space as much like their past homes as possible women represented and maintained respectability.<sup>95</sup>

Women's role in creating respectable spaces in terms of civilized domesticity was meant to replicate the middle-class ideal, and extended to providing a space for men's respectability as well as women's, significantly reinforcing what were seen as the proper class divisions. Although the social world for well-to-do society was somewhat circumscribed in Lyttelton in 1851, respectable middle-class women kept up the social niceties of the code of visiting and refined social interaction. This was a way to hold together an orderly community in face of relaxed behaviour and disregard of rules of etiquette.<sup>96</sup> Charlotte Godley reported in September 1851 on the activities of the women of the Townsend family. James Townsend and his wife Alicia Townsend and their family of six daughters and four sons had arrived in the first group of settlers. Charlotte wrote:

Yesterday afternoon I had a visit from three of the Miss Townsends to announce to me in form that one of them is really going to be married. They keep a sort of open house, at tea-time, for young gentlemen, who are very glad, here, to have a respectable place to spend their evenings

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<sup>92</sup> Georgiana Elizabeth Bowen to her sisters, 6 January 1851, Letters written to her sisters in Ireland, qMS-Papers-0264, Alexander Turnbull Library (hereafter ATL).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, Hunter, pp. 109-110, 114.

<sup>94</sup> Hunter, pp. 135-136.

<sup>95</sup> Philippa Janet Wilson notes the view of one middle-class woman that providing for 'refinement' and 'regularity' of habits within an ordered home was necessary for respectable society. "'We Are Still English at Heart': Constructions of Englishness by Englishwomen in nineteenth-century New Zealand', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1997, p. 61.

<sup>96</sup> Porter and Macdonald, p. 151.

in, and of course when anyone was seen to go there two or three times, there was directly a report of a wedding, but nothing came of it till now...<sup>97</sup>

By providing hospitality within their home, the Townsend women provided a space for respectable interaction with men, although it was understood that the callers would be ‘gentlemen’. Women presided in this context. On one level they could entertain men there without compromising their respectable status, while on another they were constrained by gossip, which illustrated the community context in the maintenance of respectability, and the paradoxical public visibility of its representations.

Even within social interactions based around the domestic sphere, women’s representations of respectability were inseparable from others’ observations. Even so, expectations of codes of conduct depended on class. One demonstrably public representation of respectability, churchgoing, was significant for all classes. The churches played a prominent social and ideological role in Lyttelton, and Lyttelton church histories feature a number of committed religious women who were active in church activities.<sup>98</sup> In colonial New Zealand ‘[c]onsciously or unconsciously the greater proportion of the population acted according to what was essentially a Christian code.’<sup>99</sup> While active church attendance was a necessary part of the respectable front, it may not have reflected devout religious belief. In terms of respectability, the outward representation of piety may have been more important than a strongly felt faith. Lyttelton churches provided physical and social spaces where women could have an active public and respectable role.<sup>100</sup> It has been suggested that regular attendance at church was not high in New Zealand, especially for the Protestant churches, that New Zealand had a relaxed attitude to religion, and although

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<sup>97</sup> Charlotte Godley to her mother Mrs Wynn, September 30 1851, Godley, p. 251.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Methodist Church history tells of preparations for the early services where ‘two Godly women, Mesdames Ritchie and Allen worked until midnight draping [the pulpit] and preparing for the service so that all should be in order’, *Advance Methodism, 1850-1950*, Lyttelton Methodist Church, MS-Pq-287, ATL.

<sup>99</sup> Jeanine Graham, ‘Settler Society’, in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed, ed. Geoffrey W. Rice (Auckland, 1992), p. 129.

<sup>100</sup> To address fully the role of religion and church going in women’s representations of respectability in Lyttelton requires a detailed examination of the composition of church congregations and patterns of church attendance. This was deemed too large a project for inclusion within this thesis, and warrants a separate study.

Christian values were important they were not intensely felt.<sup>101</sup> However, John Stenhouse has recently argued churchgoing was more significant than supposed, especially for women, both working class and middle class.<sup>102</sup> Lyttelton's significant dissenting minorities, such as the Wesleyan Methodists and Baptists, numbered around five hundred individuals according to the 1874 census, and were renowned as active and committed churchgoers.<sup>103</sup>

The churches may have been bastions of respectability, but they could not guard against the sense of threat women experienced in Lyttelton's male dominated streets. This is a common element in oral history discourse, collective memory and written sources of women's experiences in the port town. In the 1880s a woman arriving in Lyttelton was unimpressed with the town, writing of the

poverty stricken look of the place, it was a mass of little tiny wooden shanties, dotted here and there, up on the hills, down below anywhere and everywhere. The town was hilly and rough for walking, and for so small a place there seemed no end of "Pubs," or *Hotels* as they are called here, at each corner of which stood groups of men, idling and gossiping – in fact, the male element prevailed greatly, and it was rather an ordeal for the "New Chum" to have to go through the ranks in this way.<sup>104</sup>

This account tallies very accurately with the above-mentioned accounts of the male threat to women reported in letters to the *Lyttelton Times*. It is a female perspective on the situation in Lyttelton's streets that matches presumably what men were observing. However, it is from a middle-class perspective, and whether working-class women experienced this sense of threat to their respectability in a similar way is unclear. Women's presence in public was commonplace, although the manner of it, their deportment, where they were going and for what purpose, were some of a number of variables in the representation of respectability. Errands, shopping, and visiting took

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<sup>101</sup> Belich, pp. 438-439. Social position conditioned the attitudes to religious observance for nineteenth-century individuals and regular church attendance was not a feature of working-class culture in Britain, a factor that may have had relevance for Lyttelton. Immigrants to Australia and New Zealand were from unskilled and semi-skilled class, of urban and rural labourers, the social groups that 'Protestant churches has found hardest to reach at home' H.R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand, 1860-1930* (Wellington, 1987), pp. 20-21.

<sup>102</sup> John Stenhouse, 'Church, Occupation and Class in Southern Dunedin, 1890-1940' in *Class, Gender and the Vote: Historical Perspectives from New Zealand*, eds. Miles Fairburn and Erik Olssen (Dunedin, 2006), pp. 51-74.

<sup>103</sup> *Census of New Zealand 1874*; Jackson, p. 22.

<sup>104</sup> "Hopeful", pp. 70-71.

women outside the home.<sup>105</sup> Family history tells that Lyttelton women would take lunch down to their husbands on the wharf, if they did not have children who could do it for them.<sup>106</sup> Respectable women could go to more disreputable areas if they had a reason for it, but their presence in suspect locations demanded they be particularly circumspect in behaviour. Lynda Nead's discussion of the complicated performances of respectability for women in public in mid nineteenth-century London identifies behaviour necessary in the urban setting: women who were quiet in dress and manner, did not linger but walked with a steady pace and an air of purpose, looked straight ahead and thus did not notice or return men's gaze could thereby hope to avoid unwanted attention.<sup>107</sup> While Lyttelton's public spaces lacked the anonymity of the London streets, Lyttelton women still needed to maintain a respectable demeanour in public both to avoid harassment and to protect their reputation in a small community.

In the memory of women who grew up in Lyttelton in the early twentieth century, as well as in oral traditions from the nineteenth century, one of the dominant themes is of the dangerous and 'disorderly' space of the wharf and the streets of the town when full of sailors. Alice Tyro said of Norwich Quay: 'We were told we were not to go down the bottom street, because of the Liverpool Irishmen...They were hard drinkers and there would have been a lot of fights'.<sup>108</sup> Norah Summerton remembered the twelve hotels in the bottom street and the numbers of vessels in port and sailors in the town: 'There was all nationalities, all races that were roaming the streets, that's why my mother never let us out...I can [see] now that I'm an old woman, why she sheltered us from that.'<sup>109</sup> The strong element of race here is striking; that the threat was evoked in racial terms heightened the sense of anxiety. These discourses of danger were common in nineteenth-century New Zealand, and were mostly associated with the urban setting. They created and perpetuated 'a pervasive sense of moral danger that focused on sexuality and gender relations.'<sup>110</sup> The sense of the public sphere as a threatening male space, and the home as a sanctuary and retreat

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<sup>105</sup> In surviving nineteenth-century photographs of Lyttelton, men predominate in street scenes, although women are occasionally visible. For a selection of photographs see, Rice, *Lyttelton Port and Town* and the Canterbury Museum photograph collection.

<sup>106</sup> Shirley McEwan, interview with the author, 7 July 2005.

<sup>107</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, pp. 63-67.

<sup>108</sup> Alice Tyro, interview with the author, 11 July 2005.

<sup>109</sup> Norah Summerton, interview with the author, 22 July 2005.

<sup>110</sup> Bronwyn Dalley, 'Criminal Conversations: Infanticide, Gender and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', in *The Gendered Kiwi*, eds. Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland, 1999), p. 63.

from dangerous forces, had particular currency for Lyttelton women living with a rowdy port on their doorstep. By necessity women and girls were kept respectable by confinement within the safe space of the home. By the end of the nineteenth century, discourses about the public spaces and the wharf in Lyttelton clearly expressed that respectable women needed to stay away from the rowdiness of the 'bottom streets' of the town. In oral traditions and memories of elderly residents the 'bottom streets' feature as a very rough area, and for women to go there was tantamount to prostitution. Generally speaking, the only women who were likely to go there were the 'ship girls', or those perceived as such, who usually, it was understood, came from Christchurch.<sup>111</sup> Such discourses more clearly created a necessary separation between public and private spaces for the performances of respectability.

How real was this sense of threat? In Lyttelton the discourses of danger associated with the wharf appeared to be given some foundation in 1875 with the gruesome murder of an eleven year-old girl Isabella Thompson by John Mercer, a discharged cook from a visiting schooner. The murder, which appeared to be sexually motivated, occurred in early evening on 9 January while Mercer was on shore in Lyttelton. The murder had occurred in a respectable street, away from the areas of known vice, and the newspaper reported huge interest in the case by Lyttelton residents; the proceedings were reported in considerable detail.<sup>112</sup> John Mercer had been seen with the girl and later several witnesses had observed blood on his clothes and scratches on his face. Isabella Thompson's body had been found in an orchard attached to the parsonage garden on Ripon Street.<sup>113</sup>

Significantly, this event occurred in the decade when the town experienced its greatest population growth. The degree of upheaval is suggested by the increased numbers of incidents reported in the coverage of court proceedings in the *Lyttelton Times*, which also conveyed a sense of danger intruding into the respectable spaces of the town. In 1875 cases came to court where respectable women had been insulted and threatened in public. In May, Benjamin Patrick McCauley was charged with drunkenness and 'insulting females'. After receiving complaints, the constable

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<sup>111</sup> Irene Anderson, interview with the author, 10 August 2005; Summerton, interview; Tyro, interview; Marjorie Hatchwell, interviewed 19 March 1984, Myrtle Large, interviewed 10 December 1984, tapes held in Lyttelton Public Library.

<sup>112</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 20 January, 3 February 1875. Some 1870s editions of the *Lyttelton Times* omitted pages numbers.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 January, 3 February 1875.

reported he had observed McCauley molesting several women.<sup>114</sup> In December, Miss Hauck charged Martin Guttermeyer and V. Shelka with using threatening language towards her.<sup>115</sup>

The sense of danger associated with the port has been echoed by the distinction made by historians between 'port' and 'town', yet the degree to which women experienced this as a physical separation or whether this was largely a subjective distinction is unclear. John Johnson wrote '[t]he Port is regarded by some as distinct from the town...[but] over the years there have been so many residents of the town who have depended upon the Port for their livelihood, directly and indirectly.'<sup>116</sup> Women in Lyttelton could not keep completely separate from the port. Although their respectability ostensibly demanded that they keep aloof from it, the reality was more complicated. Women's work in Lyttelton could put them in contact with seamen as easily as men's work did and represented the reality of women's lives in the port town. Lyttelton was described as 'essentially a shipping town' by the 1870 *Directory of New Zealand* where a range of businesses and occupations are listed that illustrate the gendered division of work.<sup>117</sup> The transient population supported hotels, boarding houses, coffee shops and tea rooms, with boarding houses in particular being a common occupation for married women and widows. Women who worked as shopkeepers and hotelkeepers catered for the clientele of visiting seamen, as well as the local population, and could not escape interaction with disreputable individuals and the more sordid side of port life. Some businesses served the town dwellers as well as those passing through. Women who worked as dressmakers, teachers, bakers and confectioners depended less directly on the port for business. Men worked as carters, labourers, and builders as well as merchants, commission agents, mariners and stevedores - occupations that reflected the needs of the port.<sup>118</sup>

The separation between home and port, or town and port, appears to have been attempted by the tendency of well-to-do Lyttelton residents to acquire land and build away from the centre of the town, allowing their wives and daughters to retire in

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 25 May 1875.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 4 December 1875.

<sup>116</sup> Johnson, p. 75.

<sup>117</sup> *Directory of New Zealand, 1870: Auckland, Christchurch, Lyttelton, Napier, Nelson, Dunedin, New Plymouth & Wellington*, (Melbourne, c2000), Microform, ATL.

<sup>118</sup> *Christchurch and Lyttelton Directory 1864*, ATL, *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory 1872-73*, 90/25 Microfiche, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch; *Directory of New Zealand, 1870*.



genteel seclusion. Dampiers Bay to the west of the town was settled in this way later in the century paving the way for the formation of the West Lyttelton community.<sup>119</sup> The establishment of the school to the west in the 1880s also contributed to the development the area as a distinctive community, without the commercial atmosphere of the older established areas of the town.<sup>120</sup> As a consequence of the growth of the town to the west, St Saviour's Anglican Church was established in 1885 at Dampiers Bay.<sup>121</sup> However, the separation between port and respectable residential areas was never complete. Lyttelton women had links to the port through male family members, such as fathers, brothers or sons whose work took place at the wharf or on vessels based in Lyttelton. Respectable women could not be seen to publicly associate with men off the ships, but friendships between visiting crew and the male inhabitants of the town created opportunities for interaction between the sexes. Lyttelton had a long tradition of male family members bringing home visiting seamen when they were in port.<sup>122</sup> The same threatening stranger who could not be acknowledged on the street was an acceptable social caller when brought home by a father or brother. Men off the ships were also potential marriage partners, and it was through marriage that women's respectability was supposed to be confirmed and maintained. An apparent paradox is that respectable Lyttelton women married seamen, the very men who in some contexts were perceived to be threats to their respectability.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Lyttelton's social geography was well established, and for women a mental map reinforced the physical developments. The town had grown and changed significantly but the continuities of ambiguous public spaces and discourses of threatening port were still apparent. By the end of the century the port was closed off from public access, which emphasized the port/town separation. Residential areas were well developed and the establishment of the community to the west paved the way for the division between east and west known in the twentieth century.

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<sup>119</sup> Pat Tranter, interview with the author, 21 July 2005; McEwan, interview.

<sup>120</sup> Hunter, p. 162

<sup>121</sup> *St. Saviour's Church, West Lyttelton 75th anniversary, 1885-1960* (Lyttelton 1960), New Zealand Pacific Collection, ATL.

<sup>122</sup> Visitors from ships were common in the home of Shirley McEwan's family in Lyttelton in the twentieth century, and at an earlier time in the home of her maternal grandparents, McEwan, interview; Alice Tyro's father would bring family friends to their home whenever their ships were in port, Tyro, interview; Rice notes the friendships formed with local families by crews of the larger cargo vessels who remained for weeks in port waiting for their vessel to unload, Rice, *Lyttelton: Port and Town*, p. 25.

### **Marriage and Respectability**

Marriage was a key institution in the nineteenth century for determining women's respectability. It was the only acceptable outlet for sexual relations, ensured women's social, legal and economic dependence, established the family unit, and thereby maintained the moral fabric of society. The sanctity and centrality of marriage was based in church teachings as well as social and legal custom. Women's respectability came through the performance of the role of wife, mother and helpmeet, and marriage was intended to ensure, establish and maintain status. Adult women's status derived from the status of the male breadwinner, and the status of unmarried adult women depended on the status of the household. Women's respectability was thus inseparable from assumptions about marriage as the natural role for women, 'determining their status whether they married or not'.<sup>123</sup>

Marriage could bestow economic and social security and a woman could find her status enhanced by the success of her partner, although women also brought respectability into a marriage. For working men and women marriage was an economic as well as a social partnership. Concerns about respectability influenced women's choices of partner, and vice versa, and family approval of a marriage was an important consideration. Compatibility, similarity of status, age, and religion, as well as favourable economic prospects, were the likely ingredients for a successful marriage, and consequently for maintaining the outwardly respectable appearance. Nevertheless, marriage could also be a fragile institution for ensuring respectability. Lack of economic success, moral failures, death of a breadwinner and lack of support system in the colony, were all difficulties women could have to face.<sup>124</sup> Widows who needed to support themselves had to contend with the lack of respectable occupations for women, and hence they could find their respectability threatened or lost in circumstances that are discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

In common with Pākehā women in the rest of colonial New Zealand, the majority of nineteenth-century Lyttelton women were, or had been, married. According to the 1874 New Zealand census only fifteen per cent of women over

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<sup>123</sup> Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, p. 130.

<sup>124</sup> Porter and Macdonald, pp. 252-262.

twenty and five percent of women over thirty were single.<sup>125</sup> At the 1871 census, 86 per cent of the Lyttelton women aged 21 and over were married.<sup>126</sup> Lyttelton's history has the common colonial story of single women being in great demand on arrival, 'the jetties being lined with men watching the women disembark' and many supposedly engaged to be married the same day.<sup>127</sup> Lyttelton does not appear to have been especially unusual in its marriage patterns; but, as a port, a distinct feature may have been the numbers of women married to seamen. Women in this situation could expect their husbands to be away at sea for long periods, which had implications for respectability. However, absent husbands was a relatively common state of affairs in colonial New Zealand and so Lyttelton's distinctiveness in this aspect should not be over emphasized.

Historians have viewed the early sexual imbalance in New Zealand as improving marriage opportunities for women.<sup>128</sup> By this view, women could use the respectable institution of marriage to become more respectable by marrying well and thereby raising their status. James Belich concludes from Charlotte Macdonald's study of single women migrants that women lower down the social scale could use marriage as a means to social mobility, as single women migrants were able to marry men of a skilled trade thus taking them higher up the social ranking.<sup>129</sup> However, a reassessment of the impact of the sexual imbalance has concluded that its effect has been exaggerated, and that numbers alone should not be seen to lead inevitably to a particular social effect.<sup>130</sup> In Lyttelton by 1871 the sexual imbalance had steadied: the total population was 51 per cent male and men made up 57 per cent of the population 21 and over.<sup>131</sup>

Nonetheless, in the early years of settlement, women's relative scarcity could contribute to favourable marriage prospects. In 1851, two young bachelors looking for wives placed an advertisement in the newly established *Lyttelton Times*:

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<sup>125</sup> Raewyn Dalziel, 'The Colonial Helpmeet: Women's Role and the Vote in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *NZJH*, 11:2 (1977), p. 114.

<sup>126</sup> This census does not provide information on the number of Lyttelton women married in each age group. *Census of New Zealand*, 1871.

<sup>127</sup> Johnson, p. 66.

<sup>128</sup> Dalziel, pp. 113-114.

<sup>129</sup> Belich, p. 393.

<sup>130</sup> Charlotte Macdonald, 'Too Many Men and Too Few Women; Gender's "Fatal Impact" in Nineteenth-Century Colonies', in Daley and Montgomerie, *The Gendered Kiwi*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>131</sup> *Census of New Zealand*, 1871.

Wanted Two Respectable Young Women, between the ages of 18 and 22, as *partners for life*, to share the *profits and losses* of two young men, whose incomes average about £100 per annum. All communications will be kept secret. Address “P.G.,” to be left at the office of the “Lyttelton Times.”<sup>132</sup>

Their request that their brides be ‘respectable’ served to underline their own serious intentions, but it was also an indication that women were not the only ones to benefit from the social and economic gains of marriage. Men also profited from the acquisition of a respectable wife. In this case the one hundred pounds annual income advertised was presumably enough for a ‘respectable’ lifestyle free from want, but most Lyttelton women were not so well provided for. For men as well as women, marriage was an irrevocable choice, but women’s dependent status could mean ‘partners for life’ and the related prospects of failure as well as success had more serious implications. The potential ‘losses’ had consequences for women who would suffer if they and their children were not provided for.

Some Lyttelton women married relatively young, and during the immigration period evidence suggests that women often married very soon after arriving in port. Caroline Brighting, who came out in 1856, married Thomas Clarkson the son of an established Lyttelton family living in Dampiers Bay. Thomas was working in his father’s business as a boatman, and had been attracted to Caroline before she had even disembarked, as a result of hearing her singing when he passed her ship in the harbour. They married on 24 March 1857, both aged just nineteen.<sup>133</sup>

A study of marriage patterns in Canterbury between the 1850s and 1870s concluded that although more women married at younger ages than their contemporaries did in England, Scotland or Ireland, only a quarter of women marrying did so under the age of 21. Thus the availability of men did not mean women would automatically marry young.<sup>134</sup> Hence the ‘appropriate’ age to marry could be governed by customs and conventions of Britain. Women in Canterbury married at an earlier age than women in England, but ‘they did not marry at a

<sup>132</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 29 March 1851, p. 8.

<sup>133</sup> Margaret Aroha Skelton, ‘The Clarkson Family Pioneers at Port Nicholson and at Port Cooper 1840-1983’, New Zealand Society of Genealogists: 1990 Sesquicentennial Family Biography Competition Collection, MS-Papers-4280, Folder 82, ATL.

<sup>134</sup> K.A. Pickens, ‘Marriage Patterns in a Nineteenth-Century British Colonial Population’, *Journal of Family History*, 2:5 (1980), p. 194.

markedly earlier age.’<sup>135</sup> Between the 1850s and 1870s the commonest age for marriage for Canterbury bachelors was 25 and for women the mean age was 22.<sup>136</sup> Thus respectable marriages in Lyttelton entailed an understanding of a proper time and age for a woman to marry. This was suggested by the fact that ‘many women remained unmarried for several years after reaching their late teens, despite the fact that men of eligible ages in Canterbury always outnumbered the available women.’<sup>137</sup> David Thomson has recently argued for only a minor ‘frontier effect’ in New Zealand, with slightly earlier marriages for some, but immigrants were more likely to follow patterns from home. Demographic patterns of marriages and fertility in New Zealand were similar to in Britain.<sup>138</sup>

Using the issue of respectability to view the marriages made by women in Lyttelton allows us to look beyond the statistics and see each marriage in terms of a particular woman’s choices, opportunities and hopes. The Intentions to Marry Register can be used to gain insight into the nature and circumstances of marriages in Lyttelton. The register for Lyttelton is mostly complete from 1856 and an analysis has been based on a sample of the manuscript data between its earliest entries and 1893. Between 1856 and 1859 the manageable number of records allowed for a comprehensive analysis, but from 1862 the material was considered at ten-year intervals. The register shows ages of the partners, their place of abode and their length of residence, their occupations, and the place where the marriage was to be performed. A survey of the data has been used to gain an overall picture of the circumstances of marriage for a large number of couples. Not all the couples recorded in the register were destined to remain in Lyttelton. Some appear to have got off the ship and married within a few days or weeks of their arrival, and then proceeded to another part of the colony. In some cases these unions are likely to have been the result of a ship-board romance, or a practical union of a compatible duo who decided that the exigencies of colonial life were better faced with the supportive economic and social partnership that marriage provided. In others, the men and women involved were resident in Lyttelton and a shared acquaintance of some months or years can be deduced. Details are sometimes recorded inconsistently. For some entries the ages of

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 182-184.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>138</sup> David Thomson, ‘Marriage and the Family on the Colonial Frontier’ in *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand’s Pasts*, eds. Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney (Dunedin, 2006).

the men and women have been recorded, while in others they have simply been recorded as ‘full’ indicating that they were not minors and thus able to act independently in the matter.<sup>139</sup>

The 25 couples who registered their intentions to marry in 1856 were, on the whole, young. In eighteen couples out of the 25, both parties were under the age of 30. Frequently the couples had the same or similar length of residence in the colony, and they were often of similar age. There is also evidence of marriages made shortly after arrival in Lyttelton which tallies with anecdotal evidence. On 15 January 1856, for example, George Henry Parlby and Elizabeth Coles registered their intention to marry. They were both 26 years old and each had been in Lyttelton two weeks. For fifteen of the 25 couples one or both had been in Lyttelton for two months or less.<sup>140</sup>

Similarity in circumstances is the most obvious characteristic of Lyttelton marriages, and this is apparent even for those who married relatively young. On 24 January 1856 Margaret Bennett and Thomas Bradley registered their intent to marry. They were both minors; she was eighteen years old, and he was nineteen. They were both resident in Lyttelton; he had been there a year and a half, and she two years. Thomas was a warehouseman, while Margaret was designated ‘spinster’.<sup>141</sup> They had thus shared a similar experience, albeit short, of coming to adulthood within the context of colonial Lyttelton. Of the marriage intentions registered in 1856, Thomas Bradley was the youngest male, although two other men were 20. Most of the women getting married in 1856 were in their twenties although six were under 20. A widow’s re-marriage later in life could also be within the respectable scheme of things, as it tidily accounted for the problematic status of being an unattached female. In January 1856 the widow Ann Seaward, aged 44, and Francis Woodham, (bachelor) aged 48 registered their intent to marry. Their length of residence had been fourteen days in both cases, suggesting a shared voyage.<sup>142</sup>

The patterns observed in 1856 were largely maintained for the next twenty years: typically a short period of residence, similarities of age, and proximity of residence were circumstances likely to promote matches. In 1862 the settled portion of the town’s inhabitants are beginning to emerge. Two weddings in March show the expected pairing up of couples who lived within close distance of each other and were

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<sup>139</sup> Intentions to Marry Register, BDM, 1856-1893, Archives New Zealand

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 24 January 1856.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 26 January 1856.

in compatible circumstances. On 3 March Margaret Norris, a widow aged 24 and John Taylor, a widower aged 32 were registered. They both were listed as living in London Street and they had been in the colony for a similar length of time, eighteen months on the part of John Taylor and two years in Margaret's case.<sup>143</sup> In March, another couple with apparent parity of circumstances were recorded. William Reed, a widower, and Mary Ann Fletcher, a spinster, were both aged 42 and had each lived in Lyttelton for two years. They too lived not far apart, in London Street and Dublin Street respectively.<sup>144</sup> In 1872, couples with longer residence in the colony were now in evidence, although those who had married soon after arrival still featured. In the 1880s there was a trend towards the increasing numbers of native-born Lytteltonians and a rising age of marriage. By 1882 the proportion of born and bred Lytteltonians was increasingly dominant in the register. Statistics for Canterbury as a whole by this time indicate women were not marrying quite so young as they had in the early years of settlement, ostensibly due to the steadying of the sexual imbalance. By the 1890s, women who had married early in Lyttelton's history could potentially expect to see their granddaughters marry, and have an extended family network in Lyttelton and Christchurch. Marriage was more or less universal for Lyttelton women in the nineteenth century, making it the dominant norm of respectability. There is little evidence of spinsterhood. Widowhood was a likely contingency of marriage however, and the implication of this for women's representations of respectability is explored in the following chapters.

Respectability in Lyttelton evoked British values of social order and morality in the colonial context and was significant as a shared unifying force in the creation of a new society. Respectability had importance in Lyttelton from the time of its founding, although its gendered meanings for women were specific to their role as moral guardians. A strong discourse of respectable and unrespectable spaces operated in Lyttelton, which was gendered in terms of threats for women and men as threatening. Women's respectability in Lyttelton was defined in contrast to the threatening male dominated public space associated with the port. Women were victims but they also acted as guardians of respectability, and created respectable spaces. Performances and representations of respectability for women thus crossed

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 3 March 1862.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 11 March 1862.

private and public divides, and in definition were complex, ambiguous and relative. The next chapters investigate representations and meanings more closely.



## Chapter 2

### Good Women: Representations of Respectability

This chapter is about the ‘good’ women of nineteenth-century Lyttelton. It addresses how women showed themselves to be respectable and explores the relationship between women’s outward appearance of respectability and the meaning respectability had in their lives. It examines how women represented their respectability, both in how they appeared to an observer, and also in terms of their subjective identity as being respectable. In contrast to the lack of respectability or problematic representations of respectability of women discussed in chapters three and four, the women in this chapter could claim a respectability that was unambiguous in terms of the dominant norms of the community. They were respectable in their own self-identification and also in the perspective of an observer. In both respects, respectability had considerable value in their lives.

How we tell the story of respectable nineteenth-century Lyttelton women is shaped by the problem of sources. In most cases respectable wives and mothers, absorbed with domestic tasks, leave but small traces in conventional historical sources. This chapter attempts to address this invisibility by taking evidence from a variety of perspectives and a selection of different sources, some which give women’s own representations of their respectability and some in which they are represented by others. Women’s writings provide the most direct access to representations of their respectability and its role in shaping their sense of self. However, only a limited number of Lyttelton women’s voices survive in a few manuscript letters, which were mostly written by middle-class women. Indirect representations of respectable women feature occasionally in the *Lyttelton Times* reports, and references to respectability in its classified advertising give insight into the role such representations played in women’s employment. Information on the lives of respectable working-class women has been taken primarily from family histories and oral testimonies, which present a particular interpretative challenge. Such stories are a product of selected memories that, in being told and retold, express and create a family’s heritage, and are shaped by the myths, images and ideologies from the time of telling.<sup>1</sup> Representations of

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Finnegan, ‘Family Myths, Memories and Interviewing’, in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London, 1998, 2006), pp. 177-180.

women's respectability in these narratives are created afresh in each recounting. Complementing the oral narratives of the family histories, a few photographs of individual women provide additional representations of respectability. In photographs, women self-consciously represented themselves and were represented through the medium of the camera's lens, and the resulting complex images require careful interpretation. Viewed as cultural practices, these photographs carry a range of meanings derived from the different ways they were made and used, and their interpretation can encompass their content and form, the intended audience, and how they were produced.<sup>2</sup> As an observer approaching the images with questions about respectability I am reading them in a particular way. The representations of respectability I perceive are thus only one aspect of the photographs' intended effect and the meanings I take from the images are not necessarily the same as the meanings they had for the contemporary audience.

Representations of respectability were complicated by the nuances of class difference. Respectability was a form of social distinction that was related to class divisions but also transcended class. The ways women demonstrated their respectability varied with their social and economic status, and changed over the course of their lives. This chapter begins by considering middle-class women's respectability and then addresses working-class women's respectability, although in some ways this can be a somewhat artificial distinction, as forms and expressions of respectability could cut across class divides. In Lyttelton the 'genteel' were not numerous and women who could be called working-class (in terms of economic status) in the early years of settlement had often attained an image closer to the middle-class ideal by the end of the century. What distinguished middle-class respectability from working-class forms was its closer approximation to ideals of gentility. Whereas gentility can be seen as a highly developed form of respectability, and the genteel were usually respectable, respectable women were not always genteel. For middle-class women a secure social and economic position meant that representations of the dominant norms of respectability were easier to maintain. For women who ascribed to ideals of gentility, with the associated expectations about dress, domestic furnishings, and hospitality, the respectable front needed even more

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<sup>2</sup> Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London, 2001), pp. 14, 16-17. Consideration of the production of an image includes the economic, social and political relations behind them.

resources. Although greater economic resources allowed for more refined versions of respectability, a common code of restraint, self-control, and Godliness defined the 'good' women's respectability across class divides.

The forms and representations of women's respectability in Lyttelton arose from the specific circumstances and social interactions of life in a port town and a migrant community; they were also characteristic of wider trends in British society and culture. According to the contemporary ideals, respectable women in the colony were to be agents of empire and moral guardians of society. Historians' recent attention to the place of gender roles in histories of empire has given wider context to histories of colonial sites, and shown women's role in a much larger process.<sup>3</sup> Lyttelton's founding and women's role in it was related to the ideals and forms of domesticity in the colonial project. Philippa Levine argues that by the 1850s the image of the rough colonial frontier was giving way to demand that white settler areas be like Britain, 'in particular more like a domesticated Britain of both natural and familial order'.<sup>4</sup> Greater numbers of women migrants became a desirable social policy and '[m]igration as it became a mass phenomenon was increasingly closely tied to ideas around "home", the ultimate motif of domesticity and by the mid-nineteenth century, also of respectability.'<sup>5</sup> Proponents of organized emigration like Edward Gibbon Wakefield saw the migration of women as vital to domesticate and Anglicize. From the late eighteenth century, moralists used women's moral authority as the basis for new definitions of women's citizenship, and by the nineteenth century, such ideals of femininity bestowed on women the role of 'natural transmitters of morality and religion.'<sup>6</sup> Wakefield saw women as moral agents and these ideas were clear in Lyttelton's founding. At a meeting of the Colonists' Society in London in December 1850 the necessity of the presence of women was stressed. The Chairman, Captain Charles Simeon stated:

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<sup>3</sup> Gender dynamics and in particular the cult of domesticity have been seen as fundamental aspects of the imperial enterprise, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York, 1995). Women served as 'boundary markers of imperialism', p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Philippa Levine, 'Introduction: Why Gender and Empire?', in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford, 2004), p. 8. While Levine's identification of the 1850s as the time of this change fits with Lyttelton, the applicability of this generalization to other colonial regimes depends on time and place.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Raewyn Dalziel, 'Men, Women and Wakefield', in *Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the Colonial Dream: A Reconsideration*, ed. Friends of the Turnbull Library (Wellington, 1997), p. 83.

He was happy to see so many ladies and gentlemen now present, because it showed how perfect the social system of the new colony must be. Societies generally could easily congregate men together, but the presence of ladies could not readily be obtained: but in the Canterbury Settlement they looked to the influence of the female portion of the community, in the relations of wives and mothers, to refine and elevate the tone of feeling, to strengthen its religious element, and in a word to give an improved hue and colour to their whole society.<sup>7</sup>

Lyttelton's founders wanted to create 'civilization'. As the last chapter showed, Lyttelton women actively contributed to civilizing the town by creating domestic spaces and, in general, respectability for Lyttelton women was demonstrated through domesticity. The effect of the colonial 'frontier' on gender roles was minimal in Lyttelton, with limited scope for women to experience new 'freedoms' in colonial life. The focus of women's lives was their roles as home-makers, wives and mothers, although their forms of domesticity varied with their economic status. Lyttelton women often represented themselves and were represented by others in terms of the pleasure they gained from domesticity and their role as moral guardians.

How respectability was felt and experienced in the colonial context is in part an examination of women's responses to and experiences of migration, and an aspect of the continuing relationship between the old world and the new. The debate continues about whether overall these experiences were primarily liberating or unsettling, but no clear answer to this is possible. Recent studies of migration have placed women at the centre of this process, and emphasized the relationship between individual women migrants and the larger historical context.<sup>8</sup> Discourses of respectability, as a moral code guiding lives, were affected by the growth and development of Lyttelton, and also by wider social changes in New Zealand society, including advances in women's political, economic and social status. These varied forces interacted and affected the manifestations, definitions, and expectations of respectability. As the raw colonial settlement gave way to the settled Victorian town, a drive towards 'respectability' was one part of its maturing consciousness.

The structure of this chapter reflects an approach that is source driven and exploratory, rather than focused or sequential. Representations of respectability are shaped by the perspective and form of particular sources. Through an analysis of a

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<sup>7</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 5 April 1851, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Lyndon Fraser and Katie Pickles, *Shifting Centres: Women and Migration in New Zealand History* (Dunedin, 2002).

variety of texts this chapter seeks to provide insight into possible meanings of respectability for Lyttelton women. Similar themes and representations run through the different sources; all women in this chapter were operating in respectable spaces, and the domestic sphere predominates. The picture that emerges is fragmentary, partial, and selective. By exploring the multiplicity of perspectives revealed through letters, newspaper reports, family histories, oral testimony, and classified advertisements this chapter creates a multi-layered narrative. The chapter begins with women's self-representations through their own writings, then moves to indirect representations of women's respectability in sources where they were represented by others. In so doing the discussion also moves from a focus on representations of middle-class respectable women to those of their working-class counterparts.

### **Middle-class respectability**

Letters have traditionally been a significant source in women's history and the few surviving letters written by Lyttelton women were my starting point in this study. Initially hopeful of finding such overt reflections on the nature of respectability as left by Jane Maria Atkinson in her 1853 letter, it soon became clear that Lyttelton women had not been so obliging.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, I came to realize that women's sense of their respectability did not need to be explicitly stated in their writings to be inherently there all the same. A pervasive discourse of respectability operated in these letters, derived as they were from the narrow scope of the private domestic sphere, a confined world bound by specific rules of social interaction. Middle-class women in Lyttelton represented and constructed their respectable identity in the process of writing and their letters provide access to their 'inner lives', and can be read as a way to understand how they made sense of their lives.<sup>10</sup> Respectability was represented in the manner of writing as well as in their content: letters, often written to other women, were expressive of the strength of female family ties and in the context of separation were precious to the recipients. They were written with a restraint and reserve

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 1. Jane Maria Atkinson was not necessarily unusual in this respect. Philippa Janet Wilson's thesis used the writings of thirteen middle-class women and found that respectability was frequently referred to in the women's narratives. Philippa Janet Wilson, "'We Are Still English at Heart': Constructions of Englishness by Englishwomen in nineteenth-century New Zealand", MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1997, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald, eds. *'My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates': The unsettled lives of women in nineteenth-century New Zealand as revealed to sisters, family and friends* (Auckland, 1996), pp. 12-13.

characteristic of a 'more ordered world of social relations'.<sup>11</sup> Respectability was often expressed through what was not said, particularly regarding silences surrounding matters of the body and sexuality.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, women's capability in the domestic sphere, another aspect of their respectability, was expressed with less restraint. Like Jane Maria Atkinson, who saw her respectability in her usefulness, Lyttelton women's respectability was evoked in the sense of the value of their role as 'helpmeet'. It has been said that middle-class women's writing often suggested an awareness of an audience, and featured a self-conscious portrayal of themselves as good wives and mothers.<sup>13</sup>

A discourse of respectability can be seen in the large collection of letters written by Charlotte Godley to her mother. Charlotte was of genteel background and came out to New Zealand with her husband John Robert Godley, who was to serve as Chief Agent to the Canterbury Association. The Godleys arrived in New Zealand before the first Association colonists and stayed in Lyttelton until the end of 1852 when they returned to England. Described by Charles Torlesse as 'the *beau ideal* of a lady',<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Godley epitomized the ideal of respectable Victorian womanhood and was acknowledged in Lyttelton as 'a first class lady, and a fit person to take the lead among the new arrivals'.<sup>15</sup> She represented her respectability as a supportive wife, and loving and attentive mother, her letters often reporting on her husband's activities and health, and her son's doings.

Respectability for Charlotte was expressed in her gentility and the associated assumptions and expectations of the necessity of class hierarchy, ordered social relations, and refinement in behaviour. In contrast to Jane Maria Atkinson, for Charlotte, doing without servants 'was "colonial" and a reversal of civilized values'.<sup>16</sup> Her position required that she provide hospitality, although though those she entertained came from a narrow class spectrum. In September 1851, she expressed disquiet at not knowing the background of new arrivals and thus not being able to see

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.; Penny Russell, *A Wish of Distinction: Colonial Gentility and Femininity* (Melbourne, 1994), p. 93. Russell writes: 'Though women were denied a language in which explicitly to articulate sexual experience, they could and did communicate effectively by a carefully constituted language of silence', p. 110.

<sup>13</sup> Russell, p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Torlesse to his mother Catherine Torlesse, 4 December 1850, in Peter Maling, ed. *The Torlesse Papers 1848-1851*, 2nd ed. (Christchurch, 2003), p. 184.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Torlesse to his mother Catherine Torlesse, 5 January 1851, Maling, p. 190.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Garner, 'The First "First Lady": Charlotte Godley 1821-1907', in *Remembering Godley: A Portrait of Canterbury's Founder*, ed. Mark Stocker (Christchurch, 2001), p. 64.

where they fitted into the social hierarchy. Nonetheless, she concluded that as long as their outward conduct conformed to accepted etiquette she had no reason to object to them:

In a Colony, one comes across such curious people; it seems very ungracious to say so, but unconsciously one becomes almost a little afraid of new-comers, unless one knows something about them. If anyone gets into a scrape, or makes a bad marriage—‘Oh, go out to New Zealand (or some other very distant Colony) where no one will know anything about it.’ One is sometimes disposed to feel a little indignant about it, but in fact, it is a very good and right thing that there should be a place where people can, as it were, begin over again; and if they will only not often call very early in the morning, and not sit very long, I am sure I have no right to complain.<sup>17</sup>

Here Charlotte betrayed some ambivalence about the respectable front. Although she saw the necessity for the etiquette of genteel respectability and its role in proper social order and interaction, her suspicion about the actual respectability of some of her female callers made her uneasy.

For Charlotte her domestic servants played a key role in making and representing a highly respectable life, and she wrote of the servant shortage as ‘one of the great miseries of human life in N.Z.’ – a sentiment echoed by her peers.<sup>18</sup> Here, ‘human life’ meant middle-class women of her own order; her respectability rested on a sense of her superior status, and her servants contributed to this status. Charlotte’s relationship with her female servants suggests some unease about the altered balance of power in the settlement.<sup>19</sup> Her ladies’ maid Mary Powles took on a range of tasks, including cooking, allowing Charlotte to maintain genteel respectability. Although, as Jean Garner suggests, the two women made compromises for the colonial situation, they ‘maintained a professional distance’.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, the housemaid Elisabeth Lewis, who soon left their service to marry, demonstrated an independence of which

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<sup>17</sup> Charlotte Godley to her mother Mrs Charles Wynn, 3 September 1851, in John R. Godley, ed. *Letters From Early New Zealand by Charlotte Godley 1850-1853* (Christchurch, 1951), p. 233.

<sup>18</sup> Charlotte Godley to her mother, 12 June 1850, Maling, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Garner, pp. 70-71.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.

Charlotte disapproved.<sup>21</sup> After Elisabeth's marriage Charlotte deplored the behaviour that demonstrated she had ideas above her station, reporting she was 'so tremendously ladylike and grand now'.<sup>22</sup>

Charlotte represented a superior form of respectability by adhering to standards of 'home'. Jean Garner notes how in Lyttelton Charlotte created a recognizably English home, with some compromises as her 'household management was more flexible and her guest list more inclusive'.<sup>23</sup> In similar fashion Philippa Janet Wilson found in her thesis on middle-class women's construction of Englishness that for one of her subjects genteel respectability was kept up through standards of refinement, such as in the creation of an English home; there were similar fears that without this, social distinctions could not be kept up.<sup>24</sup> Middle-class women in Lyttelton represented their respectability through a performance of genteel femininity, which could be shaped by the material conditions of their lives, so migration was a great disruption. According to Penny Russell, '[w]omen found their greatest security in the construction and identification of a known social world'.<sup>25</sup> Representations of respectability arose from their forms of social interactions within the domestic sphere and the world they created for themselves through family.

Surviving letters written by Alicia Townsend to her daughter Maggie between 1866 and 1869 also focused on the proper female concerns of home, family and domestic duties, and showed the strong emotional bonds between women in the family. Alicia Townsend and her husband James Townsend, who had emigrated with their large family, had prospered in New Zealand, with several daughters marrying prominent men in Canterbury society. Mary Townsend married Dr William Donald, an important Lyttelton figure, and Maggie Townsend married Crosbie Ward, who arrived in New Zealand in 1852. Ward became an active figure in politics and business, as well as proprietor of the *Lyttelton Times* from 1856. At the time the

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<sup>21</sup> Charlotte wrote of making Elisabeth wear caps again which was 'uncolonial' but appropriate to her position as a servant, Charlotte Godley to her mother, 29 April 1851, in Godley, p. 195. Penny Russell notes that the genteel preferred working-class women to dress according to their station, for example with a simple bonnet rather than a fussy hat: Employers saw 'respectability and sincerity in a bonnet', Russell, p. 178. Different perceptions of working-class respectability are discussed below and in the following chapters.

<sup>22</sup> Charlotte Godley to her mother, 31 May 1852, Godley, p. 322.

<sup>23</sup> Garner, p. 74.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, p. 61. Radhika Mohanram goes further and sees the re-creation of Britishness and the role of Victorian domestic ideology as part of the imperial enterprise that required domination of colonial landscape and assimilation of the colonized 'other'. Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space* (Minneapolis, 1999), pp. 152, 165.

<sup>25</sup> Russell, p. 14.



letters were written he was serving as Canterbury Provincial Government Agent in London. In the first letter in the series, written in 1866 to Maggie in London, Alicia reported the sad news of her husband's death. More sorrow was to come. In further letters Alicia wrote of her daughter Mary's failing health, although with some optimism about her possible recovery. In London misfortune struck Maggie also, with Crosbie Ward's death in 1867. Despite the sad circumstances described in these letters Alicia's sorrow was expressed with restraint and imbued with the sense of duty and satisfaction gained from the domestic role and the consolation that could be derived from it. Women's supportive and subordinate role to their husbands was assumed, but was represented positively and without a sense of restriction, which demonstrates how respectable femininity was constructed around the 'positive incitement to behaviour' that came from the pleasure of self-sacrifice and associated notions of fulfillment.<sup>26</sup> For Alicia Townsend and her daughters their respectability and their femininity were entwined in their sense of self.

Representations of respectability were informed by moral codes of what was acceptable and appropriate behaviour. This could take the form of an outward show of appropriate ritual behaviour such as in the conduct associated with death and mourning. Alicia's letter on her husband's death epitomized what can be seen as suitable behaviour in the circumstances of death: she expressed her grief but in a controlled and seemly way, and represented herself at her husband's deathbed as the conventional sorrowing but composed wife, piously looking to God and their eventual reunion: 'I now do struggle hard to look up for the help that is promised and look onward to the happy future when we shall join our beloved ones in our redeemers Kingdom'.<sup>27</sup> As a widow Alicia wrote on the necessary black-bordered paper and stressed that her mourning clothing has been procured for her: 'Frances and Marcia & Jane Andrews executed all my mourning in Christchurch so I had no trouble at all.'<sup>28</sup> While women were categorized as emotional, strongly felt emotion must be expressed with restraint.<sup>29</sup> Respectability went hand in hand with self-control.

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<sup>26</sup> Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1988), p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Alicia Townsend to her daughter Margaret (Maggie), 28 August 1866, Letters from Alicia Townsend to her daughter Margaret and Mr Cooke, 1866-1869, MS-Papers-0605-02, ATL.

<sup>28</sup> Alicia Townsend to her daughter Maggie, 28 August 1866.

<sup>29</sup> Russell, p. 120. The controlled grief of the rituals of mourning was an important part of the genteel performance.

Codes of conduct also surrounded the correct way marriages should be undertaken. In 1868 Alicia received word that her widowed daughter Maggie, resident in London, was intending to marry again - an engagement that must have taken place not much more than a year after she had been widowed. In a letter to Maggie, despite her pleasure in the news, Alicia expressed some unease and 'a little startled feeling' due to worry about the appearance of unseemly haste in her widowed daughter's remarrying.<sup>30</sup> A letter in October 1868 to Mr Cooke, her daughter's intended husband, continued with the theme of allaying suspicions about the possible irregular nature of the marriage. Mrs Ward, the mother of Crosbie Ward, Maggie's late husband, sent Alicia a letter with further explanation about the circumstance of Maggie's engagement. John Cooke was, it seems, a close friend of Crosbie Ward and Alicia writes:

dear Mrs Ward of Killinchy explained every adverse circumstance that so worried poor Maggie at last to make her quite ill and the lonely desolate position she found herself in London...accompanied with so many sweet kind excuses for the apparent disregard of the short period since dear Crosbie was taken from her, that I was quite satisfied that you had acted most disinterestedly and my dear child had found a protector that I am sure I have great reason to be thankful for. I was startled at first at the sudden news I should not be honest if I did not confess, but at the subsequent explanations of dear Mrs Ward my surprise faded away and can quite understand how circumstances alter your judgment of cases and in a Colonial life I think our ideas are not so rigidly conventional.<sup>31</sup>

Despite Alicia's comment suggesting that she allowed for some relaxing of strict notions of behaviour in the colonial context, marriage in her belief appeared to be the proper estate for an unattached but vulnerable woman: 'I have indeed my dearest child felt much for your unprotected position with your warm heart and fearless trust in every body, from what I have heard and now conclude from his own, Mr Cookes letter you will have the priceless gift of an honest heart and a strong loving hand to cherish and guide you.'<sup>32</sup> Respectability here is in the condition of dependency, which is seen as natural and gratifying for women.<sup>33</sup> She is further reconciled by the revelation that Maggie's late husband Crosbie's wishes had been for

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<sup>30</sup> Alicia Townsend to her daughter Maggie, 3 August 1868.

<sup>31</sup> Alicia Townsend to John George Cooke, 7 October 1868.

<sup>32</sup> Alicia Townsend to her daughter Maggie, 3 August 1868.

<sup>33</sup> Nead, p. 29.

her daughter's happiness: 'dear Crosbie...looking forward to your future good and the dear children's happiness decides us in thinking it is a most happy event for you.'<sup>34</sup>

Idealized domesticity and the comforts and consolation to be found in the domestic sphere contributed to representations of respectability. Writing of Maggie's past anxieties her mother emphasized the solace to be expected in the family joys to come:

you will soon I trust get in good health and spirits again, which is natural to you, though easily upset in nerves by anxiety I have quite entered into all your painful feelings under each trial as it came but I will not dwell on the sad subject but trust now your two sun beams are come home there is great joy in your dwelling, and your dear kind husband is participating in the happiness excusing the noise and volatility.<sup>35</sup>

She continued the theme in her letter to Maggie's husband and expressed happiness at her daughter's good fortune and contentment that the proper order of family life would be restored. She commended her daughter's children to his care writing 'your own kind thoughts towards the two dear fatherless ones will I pray be fully rewarded by their love'.<sup>36</sup>

Women's gendered respectability was also apparent in the ambivalent way physical frailty was linked with moral strength.<sup>37</sup> Accounts of illness were commonly represented in terms of women's patient suffering, and give an impression of an unstated expectation that such suffering was women's lot. Respectability and feminine virtue were equated with having the strength and courage to endure. Alicia Townsend was in her seventies at the time of writing and her health was troubling her, but she did not complain and wrote with quiet resignation. 'I try to be helpful to the best of my poor 73 years the visitors are turned over to me to chat with, which my deafness must render very tiresome to them.'<sup>38</sup> Her 1869 letters tell sadly of her daughter Mary's failing health, loss of strength and a continued affliction of a contraction and paralysis of her face; Mary was to die later that same year. Mary's

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<sup>34</sup> Alicia Townsend to her daughter Maggie, 3 August 1868.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 30 October 1868.

<sup>36</sup> Alicia Townsend to John George Cooke, 31 July 1868.

<sup>37</sup> Nead, p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> Alicia Townsend to her daughter Maggie, 5 January 1869.

noble suffering is stressed: 'But she is so patient and cheerful that she soon actively attends to all her duties and neighbourly amusements on the least return of strength.'<sup>39</sup>

Another collection of surviving letters written by Sophia Latter, another middle-class woman, dating from 1855 and 1856, have a great similarity in content and expression. An account of an accident in Sophia's letter to her Aunt in England in 1857 was expressed within a similar discourse of the proper way of coping with illness or pain. Sophia's mother had taken a piece of wood and finding it too big for their kitchen stove had tried to chop it down with a hatchet. Sophia writes that in so doing one end had flown up and 'struck her left eye very violently...She was so stunned by the blow that for some little time she scarcely felt any pain she walked into the house & called us & calmly told us she felt sure the sight was gone.'<sup>40</sup> This had happened two weeks previously and Sophia reported that although 'the agonising pain has in some degree passed away' the shock of the accident to her mother was such 'that what she suffers from intense nervous headaches few can tell'.<sup>41</sup> Though medical opinion agreed that the sight of the injured eye would not return, Sophia reported 'Dear Mama is so patient and has never once complained though her sufferings have been great'. Sophia's role was the devoted nurse to the sick room: 'please excuse this hurried account but I grudge each moment from the dark room'.<sup>42</sup>

Women's nurturing role was integral to respectable domesticity and their sense of self was associated with the pleasure that could be gained from it and the knowledge that they were indispensable. Sophia Latter, writing in 1855, stressed this when, reunited with her husband in Lyttelton, he was immediately taken ill with influenza: It 'made him so ill that he was obliged to have medical advice and keep in bed 2 days it was providential circumstance that I was here to nurse him as he had not the attention he ought to have had in his lodgings'.<sup>43</sup> Here she self-consciously portrays her conformity to the feminine ideal. This need to assert that she was fulfilling her duty was also apparent when shortly after arriving in Lyttelton her description of her surroundings and her appreciation of the setting and the view over the harbour was juxtaposed with domestic concerns. She described the view out the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 30 October 1868.

<sup>40</sup> Sophia Latter to her Aunt, 22 April 1857, Latter family Papers, 1855-1868, MS-Papers-3502, ATL.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Sophia Latter to her sister Sarah, 6 December 1855.

window of '8 cottages here and there dotted on the hill' and in the next sentence wrote of her walk up to them to try to find someone to help with their washing.<sup>44</sup>

Women's sense of their respectability was linked to their conformity to standards of appropriate feminine behaviour. In the process of writing women reflected on their feelings and their conduct.<sup>45</sup> Appropriate behaviour involved keeping up proper standards of refinement and women's expectations of themselves could be represented through anxious self-assessment. Even private lapses needed explanation. Sophia Latter, determined to write to her sister despite a very hot day, as the steamer that took the mail was soon to leave, excused her untidy writing blaming it 'for the fact that I am sitting minus stockings', but adding 'of course I am in my bedroom'.<sup>46</sup> When Bishop Selwyn and his wife arrived at her garden gate she hastily put on the 'aforementioned articles'.<sup>47</sup>

While these women's representations of themselves show a largely happy engagement with their domesticity, they also reflect in some measure Beverley Skeggs' observation that '[r]espectability, domestic ideals and caring all establish constraints on women's lives...They also reproduce distinctions between women: those who have invested in these constraints can feel superior to those who have not.'<sup>48</sup> Such distinctions appear in the perceptions of middle-class and working-class respectability, and of 'good' and 'bad' women. In their letters, women speak for themselves and in the Lyttelton examples we can glimpse an awareness of class (socio-economic status); however, an awareness of and concern with respectability is a more profound distinction. The next part of the discussion is based on sources, such as oral discourses, where class awareness as an expression of social distinction is often invisible.

### **Working-class respectability**

The nature and role of working-class respectability depended on perspective. Respectability had a different character for women below middle-class status, in the view of their social superiors. A respectable working-class woman should be thrifty, pious, sober, chaste, hard working, not showy in dress, and must know her place as

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Porter and Macdonald, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> Sophia Latter to her sister Sarah, November 1856.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London, 1997), p. 41.

‘above all she could not display aspirations above her station/class in either her personal or domestic adornment.’<sup>49</sup> Adherence to these standards of behaviour could be linked to relative prosperity in life. Writing of colonial Australia, Miriam Dixson’s statement could be just as true for ordinary working people in New Zealand: ‘to be respectable – to be sober rather than drunken, to be hardworking rather than feckless, to be responsible, to be polite – could mean a great deal. It could mean the difference between survival and starvation; or between modest progress up the social ladder and subsistence on its lowest rungs.’<sup>50</sup> Respectability could be both a psychological prop and contribute directly to the practical means of alleviating difficulties, whether by demonstrating women’s attractiveness as potential employees or in marriage.

The fluid nature of class divisions in the colonies produced a situation where women’s social position could be defined more by how they behaved than the type of work they did or did not do. Adherence to a code of respectability and conformity to definitions of genteel femininity were a way of demonstrating status.<sup>51</sup> However, an outward show of gentility was only one path to respectability, and was often not possible for women in Lyttelton without the advantages of education and resources. Women lower down the social scale, as domestic servants or in wage-earning families, had their own ideas of their respectability, which were also linked to particular standards of behaviour. Middle-class women’s remarks on ‘colonial manners’ and lower status women getting above themselves could actually reflect behaviour symbolic of these women’s self-identified respectability gained through improved status achieved in the colony. Sarah Amelia Courage arrived in Lyttelton in March 1864 and was struck by these ‘colonial manners’, which were manifested in a lack of deference. She wrote: ‘the curt, off-hand manner in which some of the people spoke and acted was strange and unpleasant; they were not uncivil, but brusque and familiar to a degree’.<sup>52</sup> The familiarity of the landlady of the Mitre Hotel is a case in point. Leaving for Christchurch they received ‘a warm handclasp from our smiling landlady – which was doubtless very kindly meant but rather took us by surprise’.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Nead, p. 38.

<sup>50</sup> Miriam Dixson, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia 1788 to the Present*, 4th ed. (Sydney, 1976, 1999), pp. 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> Clare Wright, *Beyond the Ladies Lounge: Australia's Female Publicans* (Carlton, 2003), p. 163. Colonial men could show their social prestige through affiliation with exclusive institutions, but women could only do so through ‘their own standards of comportment’.

<sup>52</sup> Sarah Amelia Courage, *Lights and Shadows of Colonial Life: Twenty-Six Years in Canterbury New Zealand* (Christchurch, 1976), p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

The relationship between socio-economic status and respectability was complex. Michael Mason considering the question for working-class people in England did not see a simple automatic connection between economic standing and moral respectability, but overall status and respectability did go together, with a rise in status resulting in a general tendency for groups to take on a code of moral respectability. In England a variety of 'moral atmospheres' could exist in one location.<sup>54</sup> Some groups within the working class were more superior than others, but this was more likely to apply to male occupations, such as the 'labour aristocracies': 'upward ambitions and superior status in the working class tended to go with an often very marked strictness and orderliness in moral demeanour'.<sup>55</sup> While such a comment may also apply in the context of nineteenth-century Lyttelton, it is difficult to delineate from the sources available. In the representations of women of wage-earning families through oral traditions and family histories, the link between notions of respectability and class is tenuous.

Harriet Simpson, who arrived in Lyttelton in the *Charlotte Jane* at the end of 1850, was represented in oral discourse as the heroic pioneer whose social position was typically ambiguous in class terms. She exemplified the qualities associated with women's proper role. Born in 1822 she came out with her husband Joseph and daughter Bessie in the service of Charles and Georgiana Bowen. They soon left their service as they could get better wages elsewhere. Her husband first worked in Lyttelton but later went to the Australian gold rushes where he died. From 1856 to 1862 Harriet worked as a nurse at the Lyttelton hospital and carried out her duties devotedly, receiving praise from Dr William Donald. She had also taken charge of five orphaned children by the name of Berry who stayed at the hospital. When she married Captain David Ritchie in 1862 it was on the condition that the five children and a disabled man in her care, Mr Thompson, would be taken into their home.<sup>56</sup> She was remembered by a contemporary as 'One of the finest characters among our Pilgrim Band' and as a paragon of maternal virtue, piety and heroic strength. Referring to her hospital work she, 'one of God's saints, ministered to the spiritual as

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<sup>54</sup> Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford, 1994), p. 147.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>56</sup> Jo-Anne Smith, 'Harriet Simpson 1822-1907', in *The Book of New Zealand Women: Ko Kui Ma Te Kaupapa*, eds. Charlotte Macdonald, Merimeri Penfold and Bridget Williams (Wellington, 1991), pp. 609-610.

well as the physical needs of her patients.’<sup>57</sup> After her second husband, Captain Ritchie, was lost at sea ‘Mrs Ritchie, left with one daughter of her own, five foster children and a permanent cripple, faced her task with the heroic spirit which always characterised her, and lived to minister to Mr Thompson’s wants for 40 years until he passed away...Mrs Ritchie’s memory is enshrined in the hearts of hundreds of people who were privileged to know her’.<sup>58</sup> Her representation as a particularly respectable moral person is further stressed by her appointment in 1864 as the matron of the Christchurch Female Home, or the Christchurch Home for Servants of Respectable Character as it was initially called. Harriet Simpson was again commended for her work there and she stayed until 1867.<sup>59</sup>

Oral traditions handed down in Lyttelton families evoke the heroism of pioneer women in particular ways and women often feature as moral guardians, striving to keep themselves and their families respectable. One such story of survival was told about Sarah Coffey by her granddaughter. Sarah’s husband Thomas Coffey was a drunkard, but she fought to keep her respectability in the face of the trouble he caused her. Sarah came out to New Zealand in 1879 aged around 19 with Thomas, her husband of two years, and her mother Margaret Hannah, a widow. Sarah and Thomas came to live in Lyttelton sometime before 1884, after a few initial years near Leeston where they had lived and worked on the farm belonging to Sarah mother’s brothers, John and Robert Patterson. The two brothers and their wives had come out from Ireland in 1877.<sup>60</sup>

Thomas caused difficulties for Sarah early in their time in New Zealand. While at Leeston he got a job delivering the mail for which he was paid monthly, but after getting paid he would go straight to the only hotel in Leeston and as her granddaughter recollects: ‘granny said the money would be gone’.<sup>61</sup> Sarah had to take action to get money from him for necessities, and with her two young boys she would drive a trap into Leeston from the farm and wait outside the hotel: ‘she got the two little boys to go through the door to ask for Mr Coffey, and he’d come out quite annoyed, but she’d get the money off him to pay for the bill and then get more stuff to

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<sup>57</sup> Ellen Bruce, ‘Recollections’, 26 June 1926, MS Typescript, Canterbury Museum.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, pp. 610-611.

<sup>60</sup> Norah Summerton, interview with the author, 22 July 2005; Personal communication, Barbara Hann.

<sup>61</sup> Summerton, interview.



go home'.<sup>62</sup> The eventual consequence of this state of affairs was a determination by Sarah to try their luck elsewhere. Perhaps she felt a change of job would steady him, but the result was a move to Lyttelton, with Sarah the driving force in this change: 'they must have had a few words about it'.<sup>63</sup> She saw in the paper they were calling for labour on the wharves there and 'she said go through to Lyttelton and see if you can get somewhere for us to live, and then see if you can get a job on the wharves'. He did that, and managed to get a little cottage, in a lane in Winchester Street just opposite the Catholic Church. They lived for the rest of their lives in Lyttelton, but Thomas's drinking continued to be a problem. Sarah Coffey threw him out of the house sometime after 1896, but years later she took him back and nursed him for many months before he died in 1907.<sup>64</sup>

Sarah Coffey's story illustrates that respectable women were not always able to be a steadying force against men's alcohol related excesses in the colony. Here the pioneer discourse reworks Sarah's respectability in terms of her self-sufficiency and positions her as respectable despite her disreputable husband. Sarah's experience does not fit the ideal of marriage where authority lay with the husband and the wife was a supportive but subservient helpmeet. It is more indicative of a battle for the balance of power, with Sarah eventually taking control. In later years Sarah was represented as a formidable matriarch forbidding her seven sons to marry and keeping them at home to support her financially, which they did until she died in 1932. Assertive and independent, her respectability was at odds with the passive dependence of the idealized wife and mother. Her only daughter, Sarah, was not allowed out to work but had to stay home to help her mother cook and clean for her brothers.<sup>65</sup>

Elizabeth Carter's story shows how respectability was valuable for women who needed to earn their living and integral to their potential success in the colony. For working women their employment and their respectability were bound together.<sup>66</sup> Born Elizabeth Wearne in Cornwall, Elizabeth was aged about 21 when she left for New Zealand with her husband Michael and her young daughter who was not yet two. The series of misfortunes which beset Elizabeth began with the death of her daughter during the voyage. On 16 June 1874 they arrived at Lyttelton but Michael died in

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Personal communication, Barbara Hann.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Russell, p. 176.

April the following year, aged just 24. Elizabeth gave birth to a son in August, but he too died in December that year. However, in 1876 she married William Carter, also from Cornwall.<sup>67</sup> His wife had died within three months of their arrival in New Zealand, so it seems similarity of background and circumstances contributed to their marriage.

Elizabeth and William were both members of a distinctive community of Cornish immigrants in Lyttelton, with common religious affiliation, as well as shared values for living.<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth and her first husband Michael were Methodist whereas William and his wife Mary had been Primitive Methodists. Elizabeth had come from a family of tin miners and her husband, although from a different area in Cornwall, was also a tin miner, having begun his mining career at the age of ten years. Throughout his life he was recorded as a labourer, but it appears they achieved a comfortable standard of living in New Zealand from a likely combination of thriftiness, plain living and hard work. William was able to leave his wife £1 a week when he died, and there is no indication by what is known to descendants that they ever experienced poverty.<sup>69</sup>

Elizabeth's respectability served her well not only in the long term, but also in the circumstances immediately after her arrival in New Zealand. The story goes that in the midst of her troubles Elizabeth was befriended by a family who took her under their wing. The family had a bootmaking or bootselling business and she worked in the shop as well as helping the women in the home. Apparently the couple for whom Elizabeth worked were quite fond of her, it was said 'she was a very sweet thing, and the family were quite taken with her, and treated her a bit like a daughter.'<sup>70</sup> Despite the demand for domestic servants in New Zealand, wage-earning women still needed to conform to the appropriate model of deference and respectability in the interests of continued employment. Employers could use the vulnerability of working women to promote respectability among those they employed.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, family knowledge suggests that Elizabeth's respectability was self-identified and connected to religious adherence and a strict moral code rather than a response to the expectations of her

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<sup>67</sup> Joyce Challies, interview with the author, 18 July 2005.

<sup>68</sup> The Lyttelton Cornish community originated with the numbers of Cornish miners who worked on the Lyttelton tunnel. The community was concentrated in an area known as Jack's Hill. Uncatalogued typescript discussion of the history of Lyttelton street names and neighbourhoods. Lyttelton Museum.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Russell, p. 171.

employers. As Penny Russell writes: 'Large sections of the working population adopted standards of morality important to their self-defined respectability.'<sup>72</sup>

Complementing family stories of Elizabeth is a surviving photograph where she can be seen representing her respectability for herself and in association with William. [Photograph 1] The photograph is thought to have been taken around the time of their marriage in 1876, although this is uncertain. In the degree of formality and distance between the pair, it can be read as having the appearance of a newly associated couple not yet comfortable with each other. Elizabeth appears immaculate. Representation through dress was one way of showing status and respectability that women at different class levels had in common. Elizabeth's dress is conventional and not showy, and indeed has the look of the uniform of domestic service.<sup>73</sup> Her pose, with her hands behind her back and her tidy hair and clothes, exhibits restraint. The contrast between the outdoor setting, the dirt and stones and tree stump in the yard and the whiteness of her apron represents explicitly the connection between cleanliness and morality expected of respectable women in the face of disorder. The hard work necessary to achieve and maintain the brilliant whiteness despite Lyttelton's muddy streets provides visible evidence of Elizabeth's respectability and work ethic. Interestingly, cleanliness and neatness is more apparent in Elizabeth than her husband but here as in other aspects of interpretation, the subjectivity of the observer intrudes.<sup>74</sup> Although the photograph is formal, the escape from the studio setting means it reveals more than a conventional studio image. As a representation of a married couple it is refreshingly human in the ordinariness of the setting. The garden fence (ubiquitous in Lyttelton) emphasizes the confines of the home as well as being a visible boundary between the domestic sanctuary and the dangers beyond it.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth's dress in this image is strikingly similar to that of a live-in domestic servant, Violet Watson from Caversham in Dunedin, photographed around 1900. See Jane Malthus and Chris Brickell, 'Producing and Consuming Gender: The Case of Clothing', in *Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890-1939*, eds. Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law (Auckland, 2003) p. 136.

<sup>74</sup> The umbrella held awkwardly by William seems somewhat out of place, but it too symbolizes respectability. Geoffrey Best recounts the example of a French visitor to England who was advised to carry an umbrella rather than a walking stick as 'it looks more respectable', Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-1875* (London, 1971), p. 262. The inclusion of umbrellas as props may have been a convention in late nineteenth-century photography, contributing to representations of respectability. A photograph of a working-class couple taken in Sandwich, England in the 1880s features the young man, a seaman, holding an umbrella in similar incongruous fashion. See Madeleine Ginsburg, *Victorian Dress in Photographs* (London, 1982), p. 147.

Like Elizabeth Carter, Mary Ann McLean's origins were working class, and like Elizabeth, Mary Ann achieved through marriage a comfortable standard of living which underpinned a self-conscious respectability. In 1858 Mary Ann arrived in Lyttelton with her parents William and Ann Walker, and her younger sister Martha. William Walker established a boot shop in London Street and the family settled in a house behind it. Aged twenty-three Mary Ann married Captain Joseph McLean. He had emigrated from Scotland in 1861 and became a prominent Lyttelton figure, as an elder and a loyal member of St Johns Presbyterian Church. They settled in Dampiers Bay in West Lyttelton, and between 1869 and 1882 Mary Ann had six children.<sup>75</sup> They were a colonial success story, by the later nineteenth century established as important figures in the Lyttelton community. Aspiring middle-class rather than genteel, they represented the leaders of Lyttelton society.

A photograph of Mary Ann McLean and her husband Joseph, from around the turn of the century, presents a picture of settled domesticity. [Photograph 3] In this image, taken at the back of 10 Godley Quay in Lyttelton, the disordered landscape is nowhere in sight. Instead the couple are placed at the back of their well-established home, the paved ground of the settled yard representing the change and development of the town. The dog at their feet and the bird in the cage contribute to the suggestion of permanence. Half a century after her arrival in Lyttelton, Mary Ann's respectability and her social status is represented in this photograph, through her surroundings, her dress, and the presence of her husband. Mary Ann sits, knitting in hand and her husband stands authoritatively behind her, one hand on hip and the other on the back of her chair. The photograph is a statement about Mary Ann and Joseph's position and economic success in colonial New Zealand. They had established their respectability through prosperity and upward social mobility. They conform to the middle-class ideal of respectable domesticity and the patriarchal order. The photograph is an interesting contrast with the earlier one of Elizabeth and William Carter. Although it is also taken within the confines of their home and yard the representation of their respectability is more complete and more complex, suggesting a higher status respectability. Although the couple's dress is not significantly smarter than the Carters', greater prosperity is evident.

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<sup>75</sup> Irene Price, 'The Family History of William and Ann Walker: Immigrants to Lyttelton, New Zealand from Yorkshire England in 1858' (Christchurch, 1991).



**Photograph 3.** Mary Ann and Joseph McLean, 10 Godley Quay Lyttelton, c.1900.  
Courtesy Marie Woods



**Photograph 4.** Mary Ann McLean, c.1900. Courtesy Marie Woods



Mary Ann McLean's self-representation in this photograph with its overt demonstration of her talent at knitting is particularly striking. By portraying herself in this way she demonstrates her pride in her skill, and as a particular feminine accomplishment it evokes competence in the domestic sphere and hence respectability. A second photograph of Mary Ann emphasizes this self-representation. [Photograph 4] In this portrait of her alone, she again presents herself as engaged in knitting, although the garden setting and her standing posture, makes this representation somewhat forced. Family history too stressed that she was an expert at knitting and hand sewing, reporting that she 'never stopped'.<sup>76</sup> These representations suggest the importance the display of this feminine accomplishment had to her self-identified respectability as well as to her respectability as observed and perceived by others. As a conscious performance of femininity, and indeed as shorthand for a range of virtues, knitting appears in another Lyttelton family history, which tells of Caroline Clarkson, wife of Thomas Clarkson, a Lyttelton Ship's Captain. Caroline often accompanied her husband on his voyages. On one occasion they encountered extremely rough conditions: 'everyone on board expected the ship would be wrecked. Caroline wedged herself in her cabin and despite the rolling and heaving of the ship said that she had never knitted so hard in all her life.'<sup>77</sup>

As already foreshadowed in the Introduction, the photograph of Sarah Buchanan, taken about 1880, also presents an image of respectable nineteenth-century womanhood. [Photograph 2] However, Sarah's photograph was apparently taken in a studio and lacks the wider context of domestic respectability represented in the images of Elizabeth Carter and Mary Ann McLean with their husbands. Perhaps it conceals more than it reveals, for Sarah's life, as told in the family history was one of misfortune and a grim struggle to survive. The aspiration for respectability revealed in the studio image was supported by meagre and uncertain economic resources.<sup>78</sup> Born in Clifton near Bristol, and of working class background, Sarah Buchanan and her husband James came to Lyttelton from Australia in 1866, with their five children. In 1870 at the time of the great fire, the family had been living in central Lyttelton in a V hut, one of the structures built by the first settlers. Their hut was in Shin Bone Alley,

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 53. Marie Woods, personal communication.

<sup>77</sup> Margaret Aroha Skelton, 'The Clarkson Family Pioneers at Port Nicholson and at Port Cooper 1840-1983', New Zealand Society of Genealogists: 1990 Sesquicentennial Family Biography Competition Collection, MS-Papers-4280, Folder 82, ATL.

<sup>78</sup> Shirley McEwan, interview with the author, 7 July 2005, and unpublished family history.

which ran parallel to Canterbury Street and connected Winchester and London Streets. Their home and much of what they owned was destroyed in the fire. In the economic depression that followed work was scarce and it is understood that James went to sea and found work easier to come by in Australia. A report came back that he died in Australia, but no record of his death has been found. Family knowledge does not rule out the possibility that he had in fact deserted. Sarah, with a young family to support and limited options available to her, turned to laundry and char work to support herself. It is believed that Sarah had two of her children, George and Arthur baptized at the Holy Trinity Church at Lyttelton on 30 June 1872 at the late age of six and seven, probably because baptism would have been a requirement for admission to the orphanage.<sup>79</sup> For Sarah, religion may well have provided some solace, but conforming to its conventions also provided support for her aspirations to appear respectable. The photograph is thought to have been taken at the time Sarah married again and hence can be read as a very self-conscious attempt to present a respectable image. Perhaps as symbolic of a new beginning, the photograph attempts to convey prosperity. Her style of dress, though seemingly appropriate to her age and not showy or unnecessarily fashionable nonetheless appears of sufficient quality to negate poverty. The full panoply of respectability comprising gloves, bonnet and shawl contributes to an image where the intended representation of respectability becomes a disguise obscuring the past and present circumstances of the sitter.<sup>80</sup> Through the photograph, Sarah attempts to demonstrate the respectable front.

These oral traditions and family histories give particular representations of respectability, which frequently reflect the power of the stereotype of the Victorian matron. Memories conform to cultural references, to the model of 'Victorian respectability'. Speaking of her grandmother Martha Lewin (the sister of Mary Ann McLean) her granddaughter reflects: 'I have this very clear memory of this little old lady in black with a white, like you see Queen Victoria, in a mob cap'.<sup>81</sup> Here, symbol and metaphor take over. The scarcity of information on nineteenth-century women's lives can lead to a tendency to fall back on pervasive stereotypes which inform our interpretations and representations. The photographic images of women in obvious

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. See further discussion in Chapter 4 on the role of the Lyttelton Orphanage.

<sup>80</sup> This image is similar to numerous studio photographs of countrywomen taken in Britain at the same time, Ginsburg, p. 147. In these images the conventions of the portrait form served to downplay differences of status among sitters. Representations of respectability were a common aspiration.

<sup>81</sup> Pat Tranter, interview with the author, 21 July 2005.



‘Victorian dress’ can reinforce such stereotypes, although they can also be read in a way that transcends such limitations. Clothing can indicate conformity to community norms.<sup>82</sup> In the case of appropriate women’s dress in Lyttelton, conformity and respectability went together. Nevertheless, despite their deficiencies, within the indirect representations in oral discourses faint echoes of Lyttelton women’s voices can be discerned in the narratives: Sarah Coffey’s demand that her husband find work on the Lyttelton wharfs, or Caroline Clarkson’s pleasure in telling how she knitted through a storm at sea. The voices can give some clues to these women’s own sense of their respectability.

Oral discourses constructed representations of women where symbols and myths sometimes filled the gaps left by silences. However, the silences themselves can be revealing. This discussion now turns to indirect representations within newspaper reporting. Respectable Lyttelton women appeared occasionally in the *Lyttelton Times* but the infrequency of such reports and the scant information recorded in the representations reveal the connection between invisibility and respectability in historical sources. The example of Kate Carroll demonstrates this. She arrived in Lyttelton with her parents, aged 13 in 1855. Of Irish descent, she worked as a domestic servant before her marriage to George Agar in 1863. Kate lived the rest of her life in Lyttelton but extensive research on the part of a descendant uncovered only one brief mention of her in the *Lyttelton Times* in 1894, that Mr and Mrs Agar celebrated their wedding anniversary in a Lyttelton hotel, a report where even her first name is not recorded.<sup>83</sup>

Nonetheless, the small numbers of newspaper reports where women featured represented them in ways that reflected the ideals and expectations of women’s proper role and behaviour. In common with Lyttelton discourses of respectability women could be represented as moral guardians, or alternatively as victims of threatening behaviour. In the report of an 1880 court case the chief witness Mrs Mary Ann Kay was shown to be protecting the morals and order of the community. She had been instrumental in the apprehension of a man charged with breaking and entering a workshop. The paper reported: ‘Witness rose at 20 minutes past 4 on the morning of Nov. 10, and was engaged in hanging out some clothes. Her attention was attracted by the breaking of glass about 5 a.m., and went to see what was the matter, when she saw

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<sup>82</sup> Malthus and Brickell, p. 124.

<sup>83</sup> McEwan, interview; *Lyttelton Times*, 10 September 1894.

the man lift the sash of a window in Mr Hildyard's workshop, and go into the workshop'.<sup>84</sup> She alerted her husband and Mr Hildyard, then sent for the police and pursued the fleeing offender. He was eventually taken into custody thanks to her pursuit of him. In court Mrs Kay appeared capable and respectable. The Bench 'complimented Mrs Kay on the very clear and straightforward manner in which she had given her evidence.'<sup>85</sup>

In contrast, the proceedings for a charge of 'Abusive and Indecent Language' represented the respectable woman Mrs Reed as a distressed victim of a male threat. She and her husband had been awoken on a Sunday morning between one and two am by the accused making a 'great noise' swearing outside their house and threatening to 'do for him'.<sup>86</sup> The seriousness of the offence was represented in its effect on Mrs Reed and its threat to the sanctity of the respectable home:

"Mrs Reed was very ill in consequence of the alarm on Sunday morning, was confined to her bed, and had to procure a nurse." Mrs Taylor, a witness reported the same: "Mrs Reed was very ill in consequence. They thought the accused would have got through the window to them." The Bench said it was evident that a gross outrage had been committed on a peaceable house...<sup>87</sup>

Despite the scarcity of reports on women's activities in the *Lyttelton Times*, the source still has potential to reveal aspects of respectable women's lives in the town. Newspaper classified advertisements were the principal source for Jennifer Quérée's study of the dressmaking trade in colonial Lyttelton.<sup>88</sup> One of the few respectable occupations for females, dressmaking was presumably significant as a means of livelihood for a number of Lyttelton women.<sup>89</sup> Quérée found that at least forty-six dressmaking establishments existed in Lyttelton in the nineteenth century, most run or owned by married women.<sup>90</sup> In November 1851 Mrs Emma Eugene Balmer opened a millinery and dressmaking business in Oxford Street, one of the first

<sup>84</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 16 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 March 1869, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Jennifer Quérée, 'Clothing the Colonists', *News Letter (Auckland Museum Institute Costume and Textiles Section)* 3 (2003), pp. 4-6.

<sup>89</sup> After domestic service, dressmaking was the most common form of paid employment for women in nineteenth-century New Zealand, Jane Malthus, 'Dressmakers in Nineteenth Century New Zealand', in *Women in History* 2, eds. Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant (Wellington, 1992), p. 76.

<sup>90</sup> Quérée, p. 4.

establishments. Little is known about these women in many cases, most not having left any surviving written records or letters, with advertisements being the principal evidence of their commercial activities. Nevertheless, advertisements can provide direct access to their voices. Mrs Mary Ann Coe began a successful business in 1855 very soon after arriving in Lyttelton with her husband John Coe and in 1860 she opened a branch of 'Albion House' in Christchurch. By 1861 its demands on her time had led her to explain in an advertisement directed at her Lyttelton customers: 'Although not so constantly among you as in days gone by, my desire is, if possible, stronger than ever to meet all your wants'.<sup>91</sup> Such advertisements provide a considerable amount of material on women's employment. This discussion now addresses meanings and representations of respectability within classified advertisements and examines employers' expectations of women as compared to women's representations of themselves as potential employees.

### **Advertisements**

Classified advertisements in the *Lyttelton Times* were put in by employers seeking both men and women to fill a wide range of positions, from nursery maid to business partner. Women in search of employment also placed their own advertisements. A concern with the character of female workers is one of the more noticeable features of these texts. Requests for respectability or claims of respectability appeared very frequently in the advertisements making this material an obvious and indeed almost mandatory site for a deconstruction of the term. Contrasts between its presence and absence, the use of alternative words, and comparison between its usage for men and women, reveal how the word was used and understood in nineteenth-century Canterbury. The advertisements were restricted by the necessity for brevity, but this is illuminating in that they can be saying much in just a few words. Although numerous and diverse, they offer a consistency of form that aids analysis, especially when change over time is considered. A quantitative content analysis can illustrate changing trends in meaning and expression, while a qualitative approach, looking at specific textual usages, gives insight into the meaning conveyed to the nineteenth-century reader. Although the *Lyttelton Times* came to be circulated in the wider Canterbury region and any general findings cannot be applied to

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

Lyttelton exclusively, the attitudes conveyed in advertisements were no less true in Lyttelton than elsewhere in the Canterbury Province. In some cases the names of business or individuals were included which revealed the advertiser as a resident of Lyttelton.

The frequency of use of the word 'respectable' illustrates the emphasis placed on it. In meaning it served as a shorthand for a range of expectations about both moral character and personal appearance. Commonly, a request for a female contained two facets: a request that she be 'respectable' was coupled with a statement of the type of work required, as in this request for a cook in 1851: 'A Respectable Female, who has been accustomed to COOKING, may hear of a Good Situation on making immediate application at this office.'<sup>92</sup> A particular contrast can be seen between advertisements with a reasonably full description of the work and person required and those in which the request is framed in the shortest possible terms, such as these examples from 1860: 'Wanted, A Female Servant, Apply to Mrs Hargreaves, Lyttelton'<sup>93</sup> and 'Wanted, A Female Servant, Apply to Mrs Peacock, Bridle path.'<sup>94</sup>

Interestingly, in these two cases the word 'respectable' does not appear. Within the conventions of expression in the limited space of the advertisements, there was a range of choices of terminology. Women seeking a position were often more likely than the employer/advertiser to put in a longer advertisement, usually to portray themselves in as favourable light as possible to prospective employers, as in this example: 'WANTED By a respectable Middle-aged Female, a Situation as House-Keeper. The Advertiser is fully experienced in cooking, baking &c.; or could undertake the management of a Store being well-accustomed to accounts, &c.'<sup>95</sup>

The use of the word 'respectable' in advertising appears to have declined during the nineteenth-century. A quantitative analysis was undertaken based on samples taken at ten-year intervals of all advertisements for women's employment, or women advertising themselves for positions. For each year, two months worth of advertisements covering March and September were collected. The sample was begun in 1853, so the last year's sample would coincide with the last year of the scope of this thesis; however, the number of women's advertisements for 1853 were too few for any quantitative analysis. In the 1863 sample, 25 per cent of the total

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<sup>92</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 12 April 1851, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 January 1860, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 May 1860, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 December 1851, p. 8.

advertisements put in by women or for women contained the word 'respectable'. In a corresponding two month sample in 1873, 12.3 per cent of women's advertisements used 'respectable' and by 1883 it had dropped to 8.1 per cent. The decline continued in 1893 with 6.8 per cent frequency of use. [See Appendix]

The context of the use of 'respectable' also appears to have changed over the period, although the different sample sizes between 1863 and 1893 (due to the increasing overall number of classified advertisements) makes it necessary to treat the findings with a degree of caution. Changing types of classified advertisements also affected the analysis. In the earlier samples domestic service jobs predominated but the 1880s and 1890s saw increasing numbers of advertisements for female teachers and the new female occupation of machinist appeared. One of the changes was the use of 'respectable' by advertisers for women as opposed to women advertising themselves. In 1863 no advertisers for women employees expressed a need for a 'respectable' woman whereas 53.3 per cent of advertisements placed by women used the term. In 1873 the gap had closed somewhat with 10.6 per cent of the advertisers asking for 'respectable' women and 28.6 per cent of women's advertisements using 'respectable'. By 1883 prospective employees no longer stressed 'respectability' more frequently than employers; now 9.9 per cent of advertisers specified 'respectability' as a desired characteristic of women they were to employ, while only 5 per cent of female advertisers now described themselves as 'respectable'. This change may reflect a change in the conventions of classified advertising without having significance for a wider discourse of respectability. Nonetheless, the implications of the declining use of 'respectable' are worth considering.

The terminology of 'respectable woman' was one of a range of expressions that could be used when seeking women to employ, or by women advertising themselves. Other expressions used synonymously had slightly different connotations, expectations or class nuances. Contemporaries reading of a 'respectable young person' would not confuse her with a 'lady'. Pretensions to gentility or educational attainments could come into play, as in women seeking situations as a governess, but the type of wording used could reflect the class position of a particular job, as in the case of the barmaid. A woman who referred to herself as a 'lady' often did not see it necessary to proclaim her respectability as well. A 'lady' could reflect higher social standing, although the use of the term by women seeking work as barmaids later in the nineteenth century is indicative of changing attitudes, broadening definitions of

gentility and an increasing flexibility in its use, suggesting a move towards its use as a courtesy title, rather than the social categorization of older usage. This is suggested by: ‘Wanted, by a Young Lady, Situation in Private bar. Good references.’<sup>96</sup> ‘Lady’ had associations of refinement, privilege, education, money and status. Formerly used to signify a woman’s class position and the attainments and assumptions of gentility, it increasingly came to be used in similar ways to how ‘respectable’ had been used previously, as a way of indicating a good moral character.

Despite the apparent decline in the frequency of use of ‘respectable’ in classified advertising, this source reveals the importance of women’s representations of their good character. Women who sought work actively positioned themselves as respectable, an indispensable quality for women and widows needing to support themselves and their children. Demands for respectability of women employees were often especially important for low status jobs such as laundry work as employers could be suspicious about the character of working-class women. Men also represented their respectability in their advertisements but often in a different way, such as by stressing their married status for example. Often men’s experience and aptitude, or physical capability to do the job seems to have had an equal importance.

### **Change?**

Respectability was likely to exercise constraints over women in different ways depending on their stage of life. A woman in her late teens who arrived in the half formed town in the 1850s would have felt the constraints of respectability in a different way from how she would three decades and a husband and children later. Young women who had needed to work when newly arrived, within their homes or in local businesses, at a later age and established in a prosperous family, found their respectability in their not having to take paid work, employing others to do their domestic tasks. By the 1880s the prosperous families of early settlers had established their credentials, the men as public figures and business owners, their wives presiding over respectable homes, reinforcing their status through genteel manners, hospitality, and church involvement. Young women or girls who had arrived in the early years of settlement and who had married up and coming men, saw their status and position enhanced with their family’s position in the town. Respectability for women by the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 18 March 1890, p. 1.

1880s and 1890s was likely to be connected to their length of residence as well as their social position. The relationship between status and respectability for women was probably linked to the hierarchies of first versus later arrivals.

As the nineteenth century progressed there is evidence of women taking their supposed influence for good on morality within families and the community to the logical extension and demanding more influence in public life. Letters by women arguing for rights for women reflected the movement for women's suffrage, which led to the extension of the franchise in 1893. The background to this significant social change involved considerable change in attitude as to the capabilities of women and in the means their influence as 'God's police' could take, but it also rested on a degree of continuity. Women's demands for a voice in public affairs often arose out of arguments for influence in the home, with ideals of domesticity and proper family life that owed much to attitudes current at the time of first settlement of Lyttelton. A letter written by a local female resident published in the *Lyttelton Times* in March 1893 drew on the current arguments of the Temperance movement, blaming social ills on the evils of drink. The letter, entitled 'The Lyttelton Immorality', declared:

It is quite time we women had a voice in matters and measures indirectly and directly of vital interest to ourselves and our homes... There are many important matters we would like to have a say in. We have been a considerable time endeavouring to bring about a reform of morality among our young lads and maidens growing up, so that they may be able to fill honourable positions, and make good housewives; but while so much temptation is laid in the road for immorality that exists, and is increasing, it seems almost a waste of time, judging by the terrible results that you have recorded of late and instances you have not held up to public notice. In our little township many disreputable scenes have occurred lately, even among my own sex, results doubtless emanating from drink, and we ask what good results can we expect to accomplish while so many young lads and maidens are allowed to indulge in their so-called glass served over the public-house bar. Many a home in Lyttelton to-day is filled with rags and shame. We are told many of the boys have been brought before the J.P for stealing coals and firewood through their parents driving them to do it, their homes being fireless and foodless. These are objects of pity, and largely the results of drink.<sup>97</sup>

The arguments were often built on assertions of women's moral superiority that were grounded in their domesticity. While gains in women's freedoms and rights were expected, the argument privileged and stressed women's role as defenders of morals

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 11 March 1893, p. 6.

and thus prescribed standards of behaviour for women that emphasized all the aspects of respectable femininity. An incisive letter by 'Arvaleat' arguing for the rights of married women to continue as teachers managed to emphasize simultaneously the honourable status of marriage alongside the value of married female teachers continuing to work. The letter claims that women's improved status will have a favourable effect on the morals of society as a whole:

is it not rather demoralising to impress girls from childhood, as we do, with the idea that marriage and maternity are honourable, only to let them find out by sad experience that these things, especially the latter, are, so far as some School Committees are concerned, a snare and cause for dismissal?...it has seemed to me that the playground reflects the character of the district, and that it cannot be made purer, save by improvement in the tone of the public mind towards women: that is, by the success of the demand now strongly made for franchise and representation, rational dress and improved physique, extension of livelihood, equal pay for equal work, rights of married women and social purity.<sup>98</sup>

From 1851 to 1893 there was scope for women's conception of their position relative to political rights or rights to property in marriage to alter considerably. Thus there was potential for ideals of respectability to transform and expand as women gained new powers and responsibilities. 'Respectable' women's place was open to renegotiation. For middle-class women respectable conduct could now include public work in areas associated with temperance, or social purity and rescue work.<sup>99</sup> In Lyttelton a branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union was formed around 1887 and in 1888 it had eleven members. By 1890 it had 33 members, although this declined to 21 in 1892.<sup>100</sup> However, in Lyttelton the majority of women were not involved in such activities, lacking both the leisure and means. So how did the non-politically active majority feel about ideals of respectability? I would argue that while most women did not challenge their time-honoured role as respectable wives and mothers, their self-perception could be altered by the political gains of suffrage. Their idea of their own respectability could now include a sense that a respectable woman had an active role in 'public' matters of politics and an obligation to be an active responsible voter. In 1893 a woman who claimed she had had no role in the suffrage

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 7 March 1893, p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> See for example Phillida Bunkle, 'The Origins of the Women's Movement in New Zealand: The Women's Christian Temperance Union 1885-1895', in *Women in New Zealand Society*, eds. Phillida Bunkle and Beryl Hughes (Auckland, 1980), pp. 52-76.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 75.



struggle but was happy it had been obtained, asked about the practicalities of how to vote: 'Though I have never raised my voice in public, nor used the pen to assist in obtaining female franchise, I am sincerely glad we have obtained it, and I now write to ask you how we are to get our names on the rolls'.<sup>101</sup> While 'One Who Wants to Vote' may have been uncomfortable in departing from older boundaries of women's conduct by campaigning for the suffrage, her readiness to vote openly acknowledged her commitment to the cause without a sense of transgression.

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<sup>101</sup>*Lyttelton Times*, 22 September 1893, p. 2.

## Chapter 3

### Bad Women: Transgressions of Respectability

Some time in the 1880s or 1890s, so the story goes, a woman living in Lyttelton was forced by poverty to go down on the wharf and sell her body to feed herself, her children, and pay the rent. The elderly teller of the story heard it from her grandmother Sarah Coffey who was a close friend of the woman involved. In spite of the fact that the events described happened more than one hundred years ago, she does not want the woman named for fear of the shame and distress this would cause to the living descendants. The woman, whom I will call Mrs Adams, had settled down with a seaman and had some children to him. He was involved with shipping that went back and forth to Australia frequently and so was often away. However, on one particular occasion he did not come back, and Mrs Adams' circumstances became desperate:

she, I suppose she had to tell somebody, she came up to Granny, they helped one another out like that, and so anyway after the baby was born, I don't know which one it was, she started to go down on the wharf, and, I don't know whether it was twice a week or what, but she got enough money to buy food, to keep them and to pay the rent for the place.<sup>1</sup>

This story offers a rare glimpse of the reality of prostitution in nineteenth-century New Zealand, subject matter that is unusual in oral history discourse. It explains the circumstances that led to one Lyttelton woman's fundamental transgression of her community's moral norms, providing an alternative perspective to that offered by the documentary sources on prostitution in Canterbury, which are discussed below. As oral evidence this account must necessarily be treated cautiously.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the story gives insight into perceptions of women's disreputable behaviour in Lyttelton and illustrates the tensions between conventional standards of women's respectability and the pressures of poverty and circumstances that made it difficult for women to always conform to these standards. While the previous chapter addressed women's representations of respectability, this chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Norah Summerton, interview with the author, 22 July 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Megan Hutching, *Talking History: A Short Guide to Oral History* (Wellington, 1993), p. 58. Hutching notes that oral evidence should not be taken at face value, and needs to be examined within a wider context and with reference to other sources.

investigates the forms of women's unrespectable behaviour in Lyttelton and explores the relationship between this kind of behaviour and this particular location and community. Women's respectability rested on an awareness of its opposite, and was constructed in relation to a perceived 'other'. In nineteenth-century New Zealand the 'other' could be represented by the outcast women, whose behaviour came to light in criminal proceedings and who were often habitual drunkards and prostitutes, or by the lesser degrees of transgression of women whose lives did not tally with ideals of domesticity, chastity and restraint. The 'other' was often, but not always working class, and was also constructed in terms of race; Irish women and Māori women could be perceived to stand outside the dominant norms of respectability.

While unrespectable women were often those who came before the courts, this chapter is not principally concerned with quantifying the amount of women's criminal offending in Lyttelton. Women whose behaviour landed them in court, being deemed unlawful as well as immoral, represented the extreme end of transgression and was only a partial representation of behaviour that was, or could be, deemed not respectable. Lesser degrees of transgression did not lead to court appearances for the majority of women. This chapter addresses the kinds of behaviour that challenged the unambiguous and prevailing norms of respectability. Even so the question of definition remains. The type of behaviour defined as unrespectable could vary according to who was making the judgment, with tensions between prevailing norms and the norms of particular groups within the community, which could be related to women's class status. Hence there could be ambiguity which is addressed in the next chapter. It has been noted that nineteenth-century judgments about the lack of respectability among working-class women could reflect the problem of understanding working-class moral codes and often reflected the moral code of the observer.<sup>3</sup> While respectable middle-class matrons may have doubted the respectability of their working-class neighbours, working-class women who saw themselves as respectable also judged their peers and could find them wanting.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford, 1994), p. 157. Mason writes that Victorian observers often equated what they considered to be lax standards of decorum and behaviour between young people to mean sexual licence, or lumped all observed sins together, with drunkenness in particular indicating sexual permissiveness.

<sup>4</sup> Robyn Anderson notes that condemnation of working-class women's excessive drinking was not confined to middle-class individuals, but that working class women often expressed disapproval of other working-class women who over-indulged, Robyn Anderson, "'The Hardened Frail Ones': Women and Crime in Auckland 1845-1870", MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1981, pp. 70-72.

Lyttelton women who did not conform to the prevailing standards of respectability were usually of working-class background, and the behaviour they exhibited suggests a commitment to respectability in its middle-class formulation that was ambivalent at best.<sup>5</sup> This chapter investigates how the unrespectable were represented and aims to understand what the experience of losing or lacking respectability meant for the women involved, in addition to how it was considered by their community.

Historians have sometimes made a distinction between the respectable and the rough, but how should 'rough' women be defined? Women perceived to lack respectability were often 'rough' in that they came from poorer classes, but they were not necessarily criminals or outcast. Rough women might demonstrate less refinement in language, appearance, dress and demeanour, and be less concerned perhaps about performances and representations of the respectable ideal. Rough and disreputable might well go hand in hand, but rough women were not always perceived to be unrespectable. However, women whose drinking was rather too obvious, who neglected their children or their housekeeping, or who argued publicly with their husbands and used bad language, or whose sexual behaviour was perceived to be permissive, could be called 'rough' and were probably also perceived to be unrespectable by others.

Historical representations of women's transgressions in Lyttelton are scarce and come mainly from court cases. This chapter draws from accounts of a small number of women and a limited number of episodes to make arguments about the 'unrespectable' in the town as a whole. Although it is problematic to assess the spectrum of disreputable behaviour in Lyttelton from the actions of a few, the representations in the selected discourses convey a sense of what may have been the experience of women who crossed into territory widely deemed immoral, and give some hints of the kinds of behaviour and circumstances obscured behind the silences in the historical record. The main source for this chapter has been the *Lyttelton Times* reporting of court cases involving women, complemented by oral history accounts and a few published accounts. This chapter begins by discussing the representations of women's transgressions in oral discourses and thereby introduces the key themes of

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<sup>5</sup> Jan Robinson concluded from her study of women's crime in Canterbury that the prescriptions of Victorian sexual ideology for working-class women 'were often too much at variance with the harsh realities of their lives for them to fully subscribe to its standards.' Jan Robinson, 'Of Diverse Persons, Men Women and Whores: Women and Crime in Nineteenth Century Canterbury', MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1983, p. 271

this chapter, such as the simultaneous separation and interplay between the public and private realms, the association of public space with women's moral failings, and the public reaction to transgression. It then looks at the representations of women's court appearances and considers what behaviour classed as criminal indicates about women's disreputable behaviour in Lyttelton more generally. Accounts of court cases have also been used to examine where the disreputable status of women was connected directly to relationships with men that did not conform to the domestic ideal.

### **Disreputable Women in Oral History Discourses**

This study's focus on the nineteenth century has necessarily meant that the oral history accounts drawn on have contained an element of family history. The disadvantage of this is that such discourses can offer a sanitized account of women's lives, as family history does not tend to preserve information pertaining to episodes of moral failings or disgrace. The story of Mrs Adams reveals a fundamental transgression but it shares a typical feature of other oral accounts from Lyttelton in that the episode is recounted in a way that distances the teller from the transgression. The moral judgment is implicit rather than explicit.

In Lyttelton oral accounts, representations of women and their unrespectable behaviour overlapped with the discourses of male dominated public space, and the sense of separation between the roughness and danger of the port and wharf and the safety of the home discussed in chapter one. Women's transgressions were often represented to occur in public spaces and be connected to men's vice. The story of Mrs Adams' resort to prostitution constructed her transgression in terms of her actions when 'she started to go down on the wharf', but this is juxtaposed with the fulfillment of her maternal role and her struggle to care for her children. Despite the sympathetic portrayal, her neighbours' reaction demonstrates that her actions violated community norms:

Anyway, they, some of the others round about, they just said oh we're gonna stop that so the police were going to come up and have a look to see if those children were left in the home, they were young, on their own while she was out like that and Granny didn't say anything, but she went down got the children, Mrs [Adams] had gone, she got the children and took them up to her place and put them into bed with hers, and of course when the police came there was

nobody in the house, so they didn't bother her any more. But she had to wait up to tell Mrs [Adams]...so Granny had to let her know where the children were and they were taken back in the morning, so you helped out like that.<sup>6</sup>

It is significant that the neighbours' attempt to stop Mrs Adams' behaviour involved trying to catch her neglecting her children, rather than seeking police intervention down on the wharf. The contradiction in this account is the way the breach of respectability emphasized the private transgression in terms of her failings as a mother and left her actions on the wharf shrouded in discrete silence. In this account the prostitution that occurred on the Lyttelton wharf was constructed in a way that placed it out of sight and out of mind, as it were, of the town's respectable residents; they could be aware of it but not feel a need to seek the police to suppress the public transgression. Yet, in Mrs Adams' case the response suggests that the community felt threatened by her behaviour, perhaps because she was or had been a respectable woman in the community and her actions crossed the boundary between disorderly port and the respectable town. Her recognition of the community's norms is suggested by the sense of shame conveyed in the words 'she had to tell someone', and the pressure to conform to these norms is illustrated by the actions of her friend Sarah Coffey who, although she actively helped her, did so unobtrusively, avoiding confrontation with the disapproving majority.

This account does not necessarily convey reliably the attitudes of the late nineteenth-century, as the information comes second hand, by means of a story passed down through subsequent tellers, and the most recent informant recounts in old age a story she heard as a child. Unpacking such oral narratives entails a conscious questioning of the relationship between the present and the past.<sup>7</sup> Oral discourses containing perceptions of moral codes of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century have passed through the filter of what James Belich called the 'Great Tightening', a crusade for moral harmony and social purity across New Zealand society that occurred between the 1880s and 1930s.<sup>8</sup> However, even if we

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<sup>6</sup> Summerton, interview,

<sup>7</sup> The strength of family myths shape how particular events are recounted. The bond between grandparents and grandchildren creates 'an emotive channel through which traditions and identities become formulated between the generations', Ruth Finnegan, 'Family Myths, Memories and Interviewing', in *The Oral History Reader* 2nd ed., eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London, 1998, 2006), p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland, 2001), pp. 121-170.

recognize the limitations of this account, a consideration of the function of this story can give insight into how the Lyttelton community may have wished to portray itself in reaction to the actions of disreputable women. Stories of a woman's deviance from respectable norms were a feature of interviews undertaken as part of the Frankton Junction Oral History Project in Hamilton. Anna Green suggests that popular stories emphasizing the disorderly behaviour of a woman in the community, in contrast to the respectability and conformity that storytellers usually wished to convey, 'may be intended to reinforce the listener's perception of the conventional values and behaviour of women in this working class community' and were intended to dispel negative images of Frankton Junction held by outsiders.<sup>9</sup> Mrs Adams' story was first told in the early twentieth century when the values of respectability and social virtue were very important, and the account allows the teller Sarah Coffey to portray herself in a favourable light as the friend who would provide help rather than judgment, but also enables her to distance herself from the transgression.

In Lyttelton oral history discourses of the twentieth century, collective memory and self-censorship reinforced each other. Informants spoke of a loyal community that enforced its norms, and which could be strict on its own members but united against outsiders. One woman remarked 'it's a close ship here', and that there was 'a terrible lot that [she] wouldn't be able to say because families can be terribly hurt'.<sup>10</sup> On community loyalty she said: 'you don't know what the loyalty [sic], you're never taught this and you're never told about it, but I can explain it this way, you can run down anybody here you like, amongst yourselves...but when you go through that tunnel over the hill, finest person that ever lived, ooh yes, everybody's great.'<sup>11</sup> The community could simultaneously recognize the failings of women in its midst but still consider that most disreputable women came from outside the community. A common theme in the discourses was the conviction that women who associated with men off the ships, whether prostitutes or not, came from Christchurch not Lyttelton. The teller of Mrs Adams' story remembered her sheltered 'prim and proper' adolescence in the early twentieth century and contrasted this with the rough port and the numbers of women coming over from Christchurch to the ships.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Anna Green, "'Unpacking' the Stories", in *Remembering: Writing Oral History*, eds. Anna Green and Megan Hutching (Auckland, 2004), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> May Twomey, interviewed in Lyttelton 28 November 1984, tape held at Lyttelton Public Library.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Summerton, interview.

Another woman gave a very similar story. 'I know we weren't allowed to go down the wharf...We didn't mix up very much with any of the people on the wharf on the boats...There was a class of people that did, I know I didn't... a lot of them came from town'.<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to know whether twentieth-century accounts have relevance to the situation in the nineteenth century, and it is not possible to establish with any certainty whether the disreputable Lyttelton women of this study's time period were held to be outsiders. Despite a perception that Lyttelton was rough,<sup>14</sup> it may have been difficult for nineteenth-century Lyttelton women to transgress within the constraints of a small community. Alice Tyro reflected:

I suppose there's always been ship girls, you know girls that come down to the ships, they would come from Christchurch more so than from Lyttelton...Because in Lyttelton, the men down the wharves, if they saw, you know, Alice Tyro down on the ships or down the wharf, they'd soon get back to their father and mother, and you know it was dealt with, so there wasn't a lot of it from Lyttelton, but no doubt there was a few, there were a few houses there.<sup>15</sup>

These perceptions of how women's transgressions in Lyttelton were regarded cannot reach back much further than the late nineteenth century. Despite their limitations they evoke a sense of what the community may have been once the era of mass immigration had passed, and the town was established. It is possible that visibly disreputable women caused some alarm for Lyttelton residents, anxious about the tenuous respectability of their new community.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, there could also be tolerance, as illustrated by the recollections of a woman whose aunt had worked as a matron at the Lyttelton gaol and had dealt with three Lyttelton sisters well known for

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<sup>13</sup> Myrtle Large, interviewed 10 December 1984, tape held at Lyttelton Public Library.

<sup>14</sup> See discussion in Chapter 1.

<sup>15</sup> Alice Tyro, interview with the author, 11 July 2005. The phenomenon of 'ship girls', essentially women who frequented wharves seeking to develop relationships with sailors, has a long history, and Jan Jordan's research has indicated that significant numbers of New Zealand women have sought relationships with men from visiting boats; such women often faced condemnation from the public for their behaviour. Jan Jordan, "'Ship Girls: The Invisible Women of the Sea'", A paper presented at the Conference on Women and the Sea organized by the Wellington Maritime Museum, December 1993', Institute of Criminology, Victoria University, Occasional Papers in Criminology, New Series: No. 2, Wellington, 1994, pp. 1-10.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Tennant, "'Magdalens and Moral Imbeciles': Women's Homes in Nineteenth Century New Zealand", in *Women in History 2*, eds. Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant (Wellington, 1992), pp. 51-52.



drunkenness. They were known, she recollected, to ‘get drunk and hang around the streets...they didn’t do anybody any harm I don’t think’.<sup>17</sup>

What then were the contemporary representations of disreputable Lyttelton women?

### **Disreputable Women’s Representations in Court Reporting**

Lyttelton women who were most clearly not respectable, and who are visible in the historical record, were those whose behaviour led to a court appearance and records of court proceedings provide evidence of attitudes to women’s transgressions. The source for this section was the proceedings of the Lyttelton Magistrate’s Court as reported in the *Lyttelton Times*, where unrespectable behaviour was represented through the eyes and attitudes of the (male) authorities and leaders of the community. A sampling technique was used to cope with the amount of material, and at five-year intervals a year’s worth of court reports were examined. Some material from outside this sample was also used, and attention was given to newspapers at the beginning and end of the period under study. I have been unable to access the Criminal Records Books of the Lyttelton Magistrate’s Court and thus gain an overview of the trends in women’s crime over the century. Accordingly, I have chosen to see the usefulness of learning about crime in the community in the same way contemporaries did, by its representation through the local newspaper.<sup>18</sup> The court reporting reflects the attitudes of the reporter as to what was worth reporting; his decisions and how incidents were reported were governed by attitudes and expectations of the wider community.

Criminal court records have been a significant source for research in women’s history in New Zealand.<sup>19</sup> Such studies have written into history women who did not conform to the stereotype of virtuous pioneer; yet this has also had the effect of linking unrespectable behaviour perhaps too explicitly with criminal behaviour. Jan Robinson’s study of Canterbury’s ‘rowdy’ women made visible a class of exuberant, unashamedly ‘bad’ women, cheerfully enjoying their transgressions, as well as those

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<sup>17</sup> Large, interview.

<sup>18</sup> As noted in the Introduction, I encountered difficulties in accessing the Criminal Record Books of the Lyttelton Magistrate’s Court due to recent changes in legislation pertaining to accessing archival records. The Archives Act 1957 was replaced in April 2005 by the new Public Records Act and this has affected policies applying to requests to view restricted material held by Archives New Zealand. Access to the Criminal Records Book was sought, but at the time of writing had not been granted by the Ministry of Justice.

<sup>19</sup> Charlotte Macdonald, ‘Crime and Punishment in New Zealand, 1840-1913: a Gendered History’, *NZJH*, 23:1 (1989), pp. 8-9.

unfortunates caught in the cycle of poverty, alcoholism and prostitution.<sup>20</sup> Robinson investigated the extent to which stereotypes of ‘Madonna’ or ‘whore’ affected the court’s treatment of female criminals, and she concluded that in contrast to the polarization of women offenders into victimized or sexualized, they were perceived ‘to be located on a continuum between these two extremes’.<sup>21</sup> By using the lens of respectability to consider women’s court appearances the binary categories of good and bad can be further deconstructed. While acknowledging the relevance of Robinson’s argument that contemporaries did not necessarily perceive those prosecuted simply as ‘bad’ women, and that they could be viewed sympathetically, an appearance in the criminal court would undoubtedly compromise a woman’s respectability in terms of the dominant moral norms of the Lyttelton community. Courts were highly gendered spaces where men dominated and narratives of women’s transgressions could be woven into ‘powerful moral tales’ in the dramatic court setting.<sup>22</sup> Depending on the seriousness of the offence and the degree of interest it aroused, the result could be a comprehensive public exposure of a woman’s life and behaviour.

The small number of Lyttelton women tried in court proceedings demonstrated patterns of offending much in common with findings of other studies of women’s crime in nineteenth-century New Zealand. Such studies had been undertaken to address a perceived neglect of women’s crime, in a context where the numbers of women brought before the courts was small, and crime was ‘a predominantly masculine activity’.<sup>23</sup> It has been argued that the small numbers of female criminals, who existed in a subculture outside respectable colonial society, constituted a nuisance rather than a threat.<sup>24</sup> Jan Robinson showed that the female criminals in Canterbury were a minority of offenders, and this was particularly true for Lyttelton.<sup>25</sup> In Lyttelton, as elsewhere in colonial New Zealand, alcohol-related offences made up a significant proportion of women’s crimes. Robinson argued that supposedly

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<sup>20</sup> Robinson, ‘Of Diverse Persons’; Jan Robinson, ‘Canterbury’s Rowdy Women: Whores, Madonnas and Female Criminality, *NZ Women’s Studies Journal*, August (1984), pp. 6-25.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, ‘Of Diverse Persons’, p. 270.

<sup>22</sup> Bronwyn Dalley, ‘Criminal Conversations: Infanticide, Gender and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand’ in *The Gendered Kiwi*, eds. Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland, 1999), p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Macdonald, ‘Crime and Punishment’, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson, ‘Canterbury’s Rowdy Women’; Robinson, ‘Of Diverse Persons’.

hardened female criminals often had a record of offences that included nothing more serious than a series of charges for drunkenness and associated revelry.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1850s the *Lyttelton Times* rarely featured women in its reporting of the Lyttelton Magistrate's Court. The relatively small number of women in the small population of the town and the degree of face-to-face interaction may have been effective in influencing women to behave respectably. In any case, the rudimentary policing focused on male behaviour and private prosecutions of women were rare. In the 1850s most prosecuted offences were committed by seamen and included refusal of duty, drunkenness, and desertion, a trend that continued throughout the century, and reinforces the perception of the male dominance of Lyttelton's public spaces. From the 1860s reporting of women's transgressions became more frequent in the *Lyttelton Times* although the overall numbers of incidents were small. If we consider this insignificance in numbers of female offenders in relation to concerns with respectability in a small community, interesting questions emerge. It is possible that the women who transgressed were highly visible in their non-conformity; locals 'all knew each other'<sup>27</sup> and it was probably difficult for women to be visibly unrespectable and get away with it.

In 1855, the amount of space devoted to the reporting of the only significant criminal case involving a woman suggests that it caused considerable interest. Jane Cloud was charged with receiving stolen goods taken from the Lyttelton baker Frederick Mason. She had an arrangement with Robert Carns, the step-son of Mason, where he brought the goods to her home and received half the value in return. The goods found at her house amounted to three bags of flour and one of sugar. Further items concealed suspiciously in the bakehouse, presumably soon to be stolen, included such items as wine, butter and sago. Jane claimed that she had purchased the goods but was found guilty. Though Mr Eades, a linen draper, spoke in favour of her character, she was sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Robinson, 'Canterbury's Rowdy Women', p. 21. According to the *Canterbury Police Gazettes* offences for women included document stealing, drunkenness, lunacy, larceny, and vagrancy. According to this source there were fewer than 30 incidents recorded from September 1864 until March 1877, and there were some repeat offenders. There were only three charges of drunkenness, for three individuals in 1865, 1873, 1875, four vagrancy offences in 1873, and several each of larceny and lunacy. *Police Gazettes*, Archives New Zealand, Christchurch Branch.

<sup>27</sup> Elderly sisters who were children in Lyttelton in the 1870s reflected in recollection on the sense of community: 'People in the old days in Lyttelton all knew each other'. 'School Days in Lyttelton More Than 80 Years Ago Recalled by Four Sisters', *The Christchurch Star-Sun*, 18 February 1948.

<sup>28</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 18 April 1855, p. 6.

Robyn Anderson found in her study of women's crime in nineteenth-century Auckland that this kind of crime, categorized as offences against property or as fraudulent practices, made up only a small proportion of women's crime, yet could be among the most serious offences committed by women.<sup>29</sup> Despite having someone vouch for her good character Jane Cloud received a relatively harsh sentence, suggesting that a respectable front could not help against the weight of behaviour suggesting otherwise. This crime was centred on the domestic sphere and was an extension of her role as provider in the home. Her acquisitive behaviour could potentially enhance her respectability as the goods obtained fraudulently helped her appearance of domestic capability.

Similar types of theft by women, such as receiving stolen goods, may have been more common than the cases coming to court would suggest, due to the difficulty of identifying and tracing the goods involved.<sup>30</sup> Between the 1850s and 1890s, the *Lyttelton Times* reported on this kind of offence very infrequently. In Jane Cloud's case, the baker was able to identify the flour as his and the theft was discovered. The loss of respectability was comprehensive as evidence in her case demonstrated. She had acted independently of her husband and in the face of his disapproval. He had 'remonstrated with her for encouraging the boy to rob his employer' on the only occasion the stepson Robert Carns had seen him.<sup>31</sup> A wife's crime could be excused to a degree if it was shown to be committed under her husband's influence, but for Jane to go against her husband in her dishonest practices showed her to be an unnatural antithesis of the 'good' woman.<sup>32</sup> Her loss of character would have had ongoing implications for her life in Lyttelton after her release from prison. Women's performance of their domestic role in the home depended on interactions with the wider community, and a reputation for dishonesty could be harmful in this respect. A culture of mutual support among neighbours was a feature of colonial society, a response to the lack of a safety net in hard times, but such acts of 'good neighbourliness' may have been less forthcoming to the unrespectable.<sup>33</sup> In

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<sup>29</sup> Anderson, p. 139, and Chapter 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>31</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 18 April 1855, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Women offenders were often seen as 'unnatural' and 'masculine', Anderson, pp. 47-48.

<sup>33</sup> David Thomson, *A World Without Welfare: New Zealand's Colonial Experiment* (Auckland, 1998), pp. 138-139. Thomson suggests that such acts of neighbourly assistance would have been sensible strategy, especially if they were likely to be reciprocated, but the establishment of mutual support networks could have been limited both by colonial mobility and the emphasis on self-reliance.

similar fashion, access to consumer credit from shopkeepers was an essential aspect of colonial housekeeping but credit was more readily available to the visibly respectable.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the small number of charges against women, the presence of unrespectable women in Lyttelton was a matter of anxiety for residents because it was indicative of unwelcome changes in New Zealand society. In the 1860s the European population of the colony more than doubled, due to gold rushes in the south and expanding pastoralism, as well as the provincial government's assisted immigration schemes bringing wage-workers to fill labour shortages, including single women as domestic servants.<sup>35</sup> During this decade concerns grew in Canterbury over the increasing visibility of Old World vices, in particular prostitution, which became associated in the public mind with the immoral character of single women migrants.<sup>36</sup> It has been suggested that the boundaries of men and women's respectable behaviour were defined more rigidly in response to the pressures of the growing colony.<sup>37</sup> Historians have shown how anxiety about the quality of immigrants and increasingly visible female transgressions resulted in laws attempting to suppress prostitution and the establishment of homes to reclaim fallen women.<sup>38</sup>

Less than ten years after the province's founding, and before the controversy over single women migrants became a matter of public debate, there was concern in Lyttelton about residents whose way of life did not exhibit a concern with respectability and the possibility of a criminal subculture composed mainly of men, but also involving women. In April 1860 Mary Levy was implicated in a case where Benjamin Milner had been charged with stealing a dress, the property of Henry Moss, a clothier of London Street for whom he worked. A second charge was brought over 'sundry other articles of wearing apparel' taken over the preceding month and Mary

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<sup>34</sup> James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland, 1996), p. 377.

<sup>35</sup> Charlotte Macdonald showed how the character of single women immigrants became a matter of controversy, see Charlotte Macdonald, *A Woman of Good Character: Single Women as Immigrant Settlers in Nineteenth-century New Zealand* (Wellington, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> Charlotte Macdonald, 'The 'Social Evil': Prostitution and the Passage of the Contagious Diseases Act (1869)', in *Women in History: Essays on New Zealand Women in New Zealand*, eds. Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant (Wellington, 1986), pp. 17-18.

<sup>37</sup> Andrée Lévesque, 'Prescribers and Rebels: Attitudes to European Women's Sexuality in New Zealand, 1860-1916', in *Women in History: Essays on European Women in New Zealand*, eds. Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant (Wellington, 1986), p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Macdonald, 'Social Evil'; Tennant, 'Magdalens and Moral Imbeciles'.

Levy and Robert Abbott were charged with receiving the goods while knowing they had been stolen.<sup>39</sup>

Mary Levy was a married woman involved in crime committed by men. Jan Robinson has argued that married women who conformed to ideas about female weakness, and who appeared to have been led astray by men, could receive more lenient treatment. However, this depended on their demeanour in court, and whether or not they were of known bad character.<sup>40</sup> The *Lyttelton Times* court reporting is expressive of strong disapproval of both Mary Levy and of her associates: 'Upon the discovery of the theft on Thursday night a warrant was issued to search the premises occupied by Abbott and the woman Levy, where Milner was known to frequent; and there Mr Moss...was able to identify some ten or a dozen articles of clothing, his property, valued at about £13.'<sup>41</sup> While Milner claimed that the prosecution could not prove he had not bought the articles and Abbott said he did not know they were stolen but took them as gifts, '[t]he female accused, Mrs Levy (whose husband is now in gaol for forgery), said nothing and seemed altogether unconcerned on the subject.'<sup>42</sup> All three were committed for trial with the comment that '[t]he house occupied by Abbott is stated to have been under suspicion by the police for a short time as a rendezvous for disorderly characters. It is to be hoped that the evil is in this instance stopped.'<sup>43</sup> Here Mary Levy's criminal activity was associated with prostitution. Her demeanour in court attracted comment in the *Lyttelton Times* whereas no such statements were made about the men in the case; she was viewed as more degraded than her male associates, a typical view of women who transgressed the moral codes in the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Her departure from respectable femininity was implicit in her defiant attitude, her lack of shame, her absent and criminal husband, and her residence with other men in a disorderly house, which was a euphemism for a brothel. A few days later Abbott and Mary Levy were charged with receiving some stolen carpenter's tools. The prosecutor stated that, as reported by a witness, 'the prisoners had been known and the house they lived in suspected as being disorderly, for some time. The neighbours had complained about them.'<sup>45</sup> The reporting of this case

<sup>39</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 28 April 1860, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Robinson, 'Of Diverse Persons', p. 269.

<sup>41</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 28 April 1860, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, p. 50.

<sup>45</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 9 May 1860, p. 4.

apparently reflects the community's indignation and disapproval about the disreputable presence in their midst; Mary Levy was judged to be unrespectable and condemned by her association with disreputable types.

By the middle of the 1860s unrespectable women were visible in Lyttelton, but exactly how visible they were or the degree to which they impinged on the lives of respectable inhabitants of the town is difficult to say. The disreputable 'other' could cause anxieties, for even if they were out of sight they were not necessarily out of mind. The contemporary distinction between the 'port' and the 'town' may have been a significant coping strategy for Lyttelton residents. Whether the activities of disreputable women were concentrated in a certain area or not, by associating their activities with the port the sense of threat was contained. 'Bad' women were not necessarily part of a 'port' subculture, but individuals could make a nuisance of themselves from time to time; otherwise they went about their daily business unobtrusively as part of the community. Only a few women featured in court cases reported from the 1860s. 'Notorious' Mary Ann Robinson stood out among such cases in 1865. She was sent to gaol for drunkenness in early July,<sup>46</sup> and by the end of August she was causing chaos near Winchester Street. Mary Ann was charged with 'breaking two squares of glass in the house inhabited by Mrs Thompson' and 'using threatening language and also with being drunk'.<sup>47</sup> It took the efforts of two constables to take her to the station; she was fined and ordered to pay the cost of the windows. Although such disorderly behaviour typically occurred in a public street near the port, in this case the port/town distinction had been breached. The disorder was in the vicinity of the community's churches, an area that could be assumed to have had some claims to respectability. Women's unrespectable behaviour could thus on occasion penetrate into respectable areas and cause annoyance for respectable residents.

As the example of Mary Ann Robinson shows, women's drinking often led them to make a nuisance of themselves in public. Such public and uncontrolled drinking could be a sign of their lack of respectability, which was often underlined when linked to other issues that came into court. Being drunk and incapable could itself lead to arrest, or it could be incidental to other charges. If women were known

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1 July 1865, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 28 August 1865, p. 2.

drunkards, this was often mentioned in court, emphasizing their lack of respectability, and hence warranting harsher treatment.

In 1870 a correspondent to the *Lyttelton Times* used a parody of a woman accustomed to being charged with drunkenness to make a point about the need for a new courthouse. Even if allowance is made for a degree of artistic licence, it reveals something about contemporary attitudes. The letter is signed 'Mary Ann', perhaps a reference to (and suggesting common knowledge of) the 'notorious' Mary Ann Robinson, or possibly Mary Ann Newton who had numerous drunkenness charges in Lyttelton in the 1870s and later. In the letter, 'Mary Ann' argued she 'is aluz bein miss understed' by the police who mistook her illness, which gave her 'a kind a sort of giddines in the ead' that makes her 'sort a stagger aboutt', for drunkenness. She claimed that she was 'a spektubbal wuman as keeps erself to erself', and resented being taken into such a 'durty place' as the courthouse 'wich arnt fit for a spectabilcal wumen to be tuk into'.<sup>48</sup> Setting aside the mockery, and whether this was a true reflection of Mary Ann's manner in court, the parody suggests that women in such a situation would attempt to present themselves as respectable in order to gain a more sympathetic hearing. They knew what conventions of respectability entailed even if their own lives could not fit with them. This letter suggested some empathy was felt for Mary Ann, and that such women could be accepted as part of the local scene, perhaps tolerated when not a nuisance.

Unrespectable drunken women were less likely to be tolerated when they represented a danger rather than nuisance. Mary Ann Robinson's actions in 1865, though disruptive and antisocial, were not as serious as a case a few years later where violence and alcohol were combined, and the known bad character of the woman involved contributed to a severe sentence. On 2 January 1869 Flora Martin appeared in the Magistrate's Court charged with committing an aggravated assault on Elizabeth Blackley, a young girl. Elizabeth Blackley claimed that after fetching some beer for Flora Martin, the accused asked her to clean the room and when she refused, beat her and pulled her hair out. Flora Martin herself claimed that the girl had tried to rob her of five shillings, and had hidden the money in her boot, and had in fact injured herself by throwing herself to the ground. 'Constable Willis said the accused was drunk when she was arrested. The Resident Magistrate said it was very evident that a savage

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 11 February 1870.



attack had been made by accused on the child; the accused was a notorious drunkard; the question with him had been whether he should commit her for trial. The sentence would be one month's imprisonment with hard labour.'<sup>49</sup>

The *Lyttelton Times* reported on large numbers of men's drunkenness charges, but in the smaller number of women's cases the writer's disapproval was often more explicit. Perceived disorderly behaviour, for men as well as women, appears to have been a matter of mounting concern amongst the town's established citizens in the 1870s, at a time when Lyttelton was growing rapidly. The propriety of the town, and the colony as a whole was a matter of concern, with women's bad behaviour seen to be symptomatic of wider ills.<sup>50</sup> Incidents of women's drunkenness were often reported in greater detail than men's apprehensions, suggesting the writer felt the greater disgrace of their conduct needed to be brought to public attention. Disgust is evident, for example, at the state of bodily abandonment of women who were so drunk that they had to be taken away in a cart. In March 1875 Rachel Boyd was charged with being drunk and incapable: 'Sergeant Maguire said he found accused drunk on the road, near the bridle path, and he had her taken to the lock-up in a cart.'<sup>51</sup> Less than two weeks later Harriet Meade was charged with being drunk: 'The accused was found almost in a state of nudity in Salt's Gully, and had to be taken to the lock-up in a dray.'<sup>52</sup> Implicitly such behaviour was in sharp contrast to the restraint expected of respectable women, and in Harriet Meade's case her lack of respectability was further demonstrated by her inability to care for her son and daughter. As a result of her charge for drunkenness, her children, Ada aged five and Arthur aged four, were classified as neglected children and sent to the Burnham Industrial School for five years.<sup>53</sup>

Women's offences that landed in court were usually about a visible embodiment of unrespectable conduct in a public space, usually the streets of Lyttelton. Women arrested for some kind of disorderly conduct often had histories of offending, and it seems that having begun this sort of life, women could follow the same pattern for a number of years suggesting that they had become alcoholics or

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 4 January 1869, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> In the first four months of 1875, for example, women were arrested for drunkenness on six occasions, with one Jane Rhodes appearing twice, and Jane McMahon's offence involved soliciting prostitution in addition to drunkenness, *Lyttelton Times*, 25, 26 January, 20 April 1875.

<sup>51</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 18 March 1875.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 29 March 1875.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

‘habitual drunkards’. Mary McMahon’s public disorderly conduct spanned a decade. In 1880 her arrest was reported after she failed to attend at the Police Court after being charged with fighting and using obscene language in a public place.<sup>54</sup> Ten years later she reappeared, charged with being drunk at the railway station, for which offence she was fined 20s, or in default twenty-four hours imprisonment.<sup>55</sup> It appears that Lyttelton police went to significant effort at times to bring drunken women in to the lock-up, perhaps in an attempt to keep them from harm, as well as protecting the Lyttelton streets from their presence. In July 1890 Mary Doyle was charged with drunkenness and in court it was noted that she had had eight convictions for this since the previous February, and had only been released from gaol a few days previously. She was sentenced to one month imprisonment.<sup>56</sup> A woman well known for behaviour that deviated markedly from the feminine ideal could face more attention as well as harsher punishment from law enforcers. Mary Doyle’s sentence of imprisonment can be contrasted to that of Elizabeth Hart who only a few days later was fined 10s for drunkenness, or forty-eight hours imprisonment in default of that payment.<sup>57</sup>

By the 1880s Lyttelton was well established and taking on its modern form. Lyttelton’s disreputable women often appeared to be old offenders, well known to the court, and probably to town residents as well. Rough behaviour associated with the port was still much in evidence and unrespectable women were now possibly part of a subculture that included visiting seamen. Beside the ‘old offenders’ there were new faces in court, indicating that some other female inhabitants of Lyttelton were not always uniformly well-behaved. In 1885 a number of cases occurred of varying seriousness suggesting both continuities and a greater variety of transgressions over time. In January Mrs Budd was charged with petty larceny after encouraging her ten year old daughter to steal sweets, the child taking advantage of a broken pane in a shop window to do it.<sup>58</sup> The next month Mrs Budd herself was involved in a confrontation with her neighbour Margaret Kelly who was charged with being drunk and using obscene language towards her.<sup>59</sup> Some of these incidents met with minor punishment, such as a small fine or a warning, suggesting that the women involved were not well known to the courts. Harriett Worgan was charged with drunkenness

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 7 July 1880, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 20 February 1890, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 22 July 1890, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 26 July 1890, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 1 January 1885, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 10 February 1885, p. 3

but was cautioned and dismissed without charge.<sup>60</sup> A more serious incident of drunkenness and ‘rowdyism’ involving a husband and wife received only a caution despite the obvious public disturbance it had caused. James Pope was drunk and in charge of a horse and cart in London Street, and passers by had sent for the constable. His wife, who had fallen out of the cart, was also drunk and was lying in the street, with several women pouring water on her when the constable arrived. Both husband and wife had used ‘very foul’ language and Mrs Pope had, it was reported, tried to bite Constable O’Connor’s hands when taken into custody.<sup>61</sup>

Perceptions of the character of female offenders affected how their offence was regarded. Women who appeared respectable, and showed remorse in court could be treated more leniently, as their remorse fitted well with attitudes that explained female transgressions in terms of their lack of moral strength, and their susceptibility to evil influences.<sup>62</sup> Charges for first offenders could be brought but not pressed. In 1880 the Lyttelton servant Ellen Scott was charged with petty theft of a few sundry items from her employer. She admitted the charge of larceny of two tumblers, a candlestick, a tray, a towel and table napkins. However, her employer did not want to press the charge any further, and she received only a severe caution.<sup>63</sup>

When frequent offenders appeared in the courts, impatience mixed with resignation is detectable in the reports of the court proceedings. Mary Ann Newton appeared in court three times within a space of ten months in 1880. On 7 February she was charged with drunkenness and disorderly conduct and, described as ‘an old offender’ and was fined £5, or in default three months’ hard labour at Addington Gaol’.<sup>64</sup> In July she was charged with being drunk and disorderly at the railway station on a Thursday night. It was reported that she was well known to the courts. ‘The Bench sent her to gaol for three months with hard labour, expressing a regret that they were unable to make the sentence a longer one, as short sentences did not seem to have a deterrent effect.’<sup>65</sup> In October she was charged with being drunk and disorderly the evening of the same day as her release from prison, and after pleading for another chance was fined 10s and warned that another charge would see her

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 8 December 1885, p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 9 February 1885, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Robinson, ‘Of Diverse Persons’, p. 162, Anderson, p. 50.

<sup>63</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 13 September 1880, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 9 February 1880, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 17 July 1880, p. 3.

receiving 6 months hard labour.<sup>66</sup> Old offenders could often expect harsh treatment for ostensibly minor offences, especially when they were associated with prostitution.<sup>67</sup>

### Prostitution

Prostitution, or the ‘social evil’ as it was known, was the most extreme transgression of respectable femininity, and caused considerable anxiety amongst some in Canterbury during the nineteenth century, but given uneven policing, this anxiety did not necessarily translate into action in Lyttelton. The offence of prostitution for women often went hand and hand with drunkenness, but the visibility of prostitutes in Lyttelton is difficult to establish, and the evidence is somewhat contradictory. Official reporting placed the real menace of the presence of prostitutes in Christchurch rather than at the port. In 1864 the influential pamphlet *An Appeal to the Women of Canterbury* reported that there were two women working as prostitutes in Lyttelton and 22 in Christchurch.<sup>68</sup> A few years later in answer to a request for the number of prostitutes living in the Province, a report sent by the Commissioner of Police to the Constabulary Department Commissioner Office in Christchurch in July 1869 stated ‘there are no Prostitutes known to the Police in any other part of Canterbury than Christchurch’.<sup>69</sup> Similar ‘returns’ on prostitute numbers were taken in Britain at the same time. It has been noted that such records are not a reliable indication of actual numbers of prostitutes in specific areas, yet the surveys indicated that commercial ports were one location where high numbers of prostitutes were to be found.<sup>70</sup> Lyttelton’s situation as a busy port suggests prostitution must have existed there, and it is possible that the official stance denying the significant presence of prostitution in Lyttelton was because the trade was conducted in a way that was not visible or threatening to the respectable residents. Heather Lucas found in her study of

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 18 October 1880, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> In 1890 the newspaper reported ‘Ellen Evans, alias Daniels, alias Morris, alias O’Brien was charged with being drunk and behaving in a disorderly manner. She was sent to Gaol for three months.’ The list of aliases suggests she was well known to the courts, which could explain the goal term, and ‘disorderly’ conduct could mean she was suspected of prostitution, *Lyttelton Times*, 27 February 1890, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Torlesse, *An Appeal to the Women of Canterbury*, Christchurch, 1864, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> Provincial Secretary Inwards Correspondence, 15 July 1869, 835/1869, Archives New Zealand, Christchurch Branch.

<sup>70</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, class and the state* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 21-22. It has been noted that prostitution was a feature of ports in nineteenth-century New Zealand, M.P.K. Sorrenson, ‘Maori and Pakeha’, in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed, ed. Geoffrey W. Rice (Auckland, 1981, 1992), p. 143.

prostitution in Dunedin that brothels that were conducted in an orderly manner were not included in an 1893 report.<sup>71</sup>

The Lyttelton situation is suggestive of the ambivalent policing of prostitution aimed at regulation rather than elimination, with action taken against troublesome characters, while those who went about the trade in a quiet, inoffensive fashion were left alone.<sup>72</sup> New Zealand laws for regulating prostitution were based on English precedents, and allowed the right to sell sex, but tried to keep it orderly. Policing of prostitution became more determined in certain towns by the end of 1860s, representing a greater concern with propriety within the colony.<sup>73</sup> Under the 1866 colonial Vagrancy Act prostitutes being 'riotous' in public could be imprisoned for up to three months, while control of brothels was left to local government.<sup>74</sup> Prostitution in itself was not a crime, but such things as living off the earnings of it, keeping a disorderly house, soliciting or having no lawful means of support were.<sup>75</sup> Much depended on local policing. Although law enforcers could tolerate or ignore prostitution, local residents were often not so forgiving, as the example of Mrs Adams showed. Prostitution was equated with moral decay, and the obvious presence of prostitution threatened orderly community life, as '[l]iterally and figuratively, the prostitute was the conduit of infection to respectable society.'<sup>76</sup> Prostitution caused in most cases an irrevocable loss of respectability; disreputable women could expect to be shunned, except perhaps by those who shared their status. It has been suggested that prostitutes were probably ostracised more in New Zealand than their equivalents in Britain.<sup>77</sup> It is true that court reporting made the activities of some of Lyttelton's disreputable women known to the community, and Lyttelton was too small a place for their particular activities and behaviour to remain anonymous, but it is possible that casual and discrete activity was not detected. Charges of soliciting were rare in Lyttelton, although there was probably considerably more prostitution than reported. 'Disorderly' conduct covered a range of illicit behaviour, but could also refer to

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<sup>71</sup> Heather Lucas, "'Square Girls': Prostitutes and Prostitution in Dunedin in the 1880s', BA (Hons) thesis, University of Otago, 1985, p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> Macdonald, 'Crime and Punishment', p. 14.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>74</sup> Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *Pleasures of the Flesh: Sex & Drugs in Colonial New Zealand 1850-1915* (Wellington, 1984), p. 31.

<sup>75</sup> Macdonald, 'Crime and Punishment', p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> Walkowitz, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> Macdonald, 'Social Evil', p. 24.

prostitution. Charges of vagrancy and drunkenness were also commonly used to get prostitutes off the streets.<sup>78</sup>

The obvious red light area in Christchurch attracted the attention of authorities but the surveys of 1860s indicated that organized brothels were less visible at Lyttelton, suggesting that the character of prostitution in Lyttelton was somewhat different, and markedly less troublesome to the authorities in the port. It has been argued that in Britain only a minority of prostitutes lived in formal brothels.<sup>79</sup> Prostitutes at Lyttelton were likely to be associated with the hotels and the wharves, as has been found for other New Zealand locations.<sup>80</sup> Similarly it is possible that arrangements were made between police and prostitutes allowing them to work as long as they were not a public nuisance.<sup>81</sup> Police control may have amounted to keeping the activity confined to specific areas and keeping prostitutes' behaviour orderly.

The issue of prostitution in Lyttelton shows how there could be degrees of unrespectable behaviour even at the extreme end of women's transgressions. Prostitutes in Lyttelton were possibly less obviously disreputable and carried on their activities discreetly enough for the police to let them be. Those who resorted to prostitution on a casual basis as a temporary measure in hard times were likely to fit in this category, especially if they did not harm their reputation irretrievably by public drunkenness and disorderly behaviour. In 1865 Alice Fyfield left Christchurch for Lyttelton, where according to court reports, she resided in St David's Street with a Mrs Kirkham.<sup>82</sup> The title 'Mrs' Kirkham here is suggestive of an attempt to maintain the respectable front in the context of the importance of the status of marriage or widowhood for the respectability of women living without a male breadwinner. Alice's husband Joseph Fyfield had been 'up country' when she left Christchurch, but in May, some two months afterwards, he came after her. What we know of Alice's situation comes from the court report after Joseph was charged with assaulting her.

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<sup>78</sup> Macdonald, 'Crime and Punishment', p. 13; Jan Robinson, 'Of Diverse Persons', p. 107.

<sup>79</sup> Walkowitz, p. 24.

<sup>80</sup> It has been suggested that prostitution was centred around hotels in nineteenth-century Auckland, Anderson, p. 118. Hotels were found to be a place of refuge and refreshment for prostitutes in nineteenth-century Dunedin, Lucas, 'Square Girls', p. 34.

<sup>81</sup> Walkowitz, p. 14. Heather Lucas argued that 'the police were a working class group enforcing middle class legislation and ideology' and often knew the women involved very well, Lucas, 'Square Girls', pp. 92-93.

<sup>82</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 13 May 1865, p. 3, 16 May 1865, p. 5.

The report suggests that Alice Fyfield and Mrs Kirkham may have been involved in prostitution. Yet it is significant that during 1865, according to the *Lyttelton Times* court reports, there were no instances in which their activities appear to have been noticed by the authorities. Even so, Joseph Fyfield claimed ‘that he had been up country, and heard his wife was in Lyttelton, leading a most abandoned life’, indicating their activities were visible to some in the community. Joseph Fyfield defended his assault on Alice by explaining he had ‘taken a quantity of drink, and did not know exactly what he was doing’.<sup>83</sup> He had attacked her on seeing three men in her house when she opened the door to him. Charles Mallet, who had been with him reported that he too had seen three men, and ‘one of them came out of Mrs Kirkham’s bedroom’.<sup>84</sup> Joseph Fyfield had threatened his wife with a knife and struck both her and Mrs Kirkham. He was found guilty and fined, and although no remarks were made on the situation of the two women involved, the light penalty suggests the Magistrate saw mitigating circumstances. Prostitution seemed to be indicated, and in Alice Fyfield’s case prostitution could be seen as a way of making a living necessitated by an absent and violent spouse, and constraints on women that prevented them earning enough respectably to support themselves. Prostitution could be a ‘rational social choice’.<sup>85</sup>

Female repeat offenders in Lyttelton were most often taken in for drunkenness; this and associated vagrancy charges were often related to lifestyles in which prostitution was a part. In 1870, the year after the passage of the Contagious Diseases Act, Lyttelton court cases shows an absence of prostitution-related charges, suggesting that the trade was occurring in an inoffensive manner. In 1875, however, prostitutes came to the notice of authorities for related issues. Harriet Meade came up again three months after the drunkenness charges discussed above: ‘It was proved by Sergeant-Major O’Grady that the mother was a prostitute and habitual drunkard’, and another of her children, James aged eight, was sent to join his siblings at the Industrial School.<sup>86</sup> Later in the year another neglected child, seven year-old Grace Isabella Williams was sent to the Industrial School, as ‘it appeared from the evidence that the mother was a prostitute’.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 16 May 1865, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 16 May 1865, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> Robinson, ‘Of Diverse Persons’, p. 270.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 1 June 1875

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 5 November 1875.

Walkowitz argued that the ‘common prostitute’ was only one form of what could be labelled prostitution among nineteenth-century working-class women, with some women taking to prostitution on a casual basis as an extra form of income, and others as a temporary solution to economic difficulties, as in Mrs Adams’ case.<sup>88</sup> It is difficult to know how far women who turned to prostitution in Lyttelton, whether briefly or as a longer term occupation, were then shunned by their Lyttelton neighbours. The case of Mrs Adams suggests the neighbours were likely to be outraged. Was toleration of prostitution less likely by the 1890s with the decrease in visibility of disreputable behaviour generally? Heather Lucas found that prostitution, as a visible subculture, was declining in 1890s Dunedin and the same was probably true in Lyttelton.<sup>89</sup> During 1890, *Lyttelton Times* court reports included only one case of prostitution, and the reporting it is brief and unremarkable: Elizabeth Wigg, alias Horn, was charged with soliciting in Lyttelton and fined two pounds, or one month’s imprisonment in default.<sup>90</sup> Although the visibility of disorderly prostitutes may have been in decline in the 1890s, it is probable that casual prostitution continued to exist in Lyttelton, although more covertly than before. The extent to which the line was blurred between casual prostitution and women’s informal relationships with sailors is a difficult question; women’s not-so-respectable relationships with transient men covered a range of circumstances and behaviours. Transgression became obvious when single women became pregnant.

### Unmarried Mothers

The connection between women’s respectability and their social and economic dependence on men was evident in the distribution of charitable aid in New Zealand. As addressed in the next chapter, women without a breadwinner were a problematic category; in the hierarchy of deserving recipients of charitable aid, single mothers ranked lowest.<sup>91</sup> Women who engaged in premarital sexual activity and fell pregnant as a result were thoroughly unrespectable in the view of charitable aid authorities. It is more difficult to establish how the Lyttelton community viewed these occurrences. Margaret Tennant has suggested that the stigma of an unmarried pregnancy may have

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<sup>88</sup> Walkowitz, pp. 14-15.

<sup>89</sup> Lucas, p. 122.

<sup>90</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 21 Jan 1890, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> Margaret Tennant, *Paupers and Providers: Charitable Aid in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1989), pp. 105-106.



increased towards the end of the nineteenth century, as respectability became more of an issue for established communities.<sup>92</sup> In 1891 the shame of an unmarried pregnancy for a woman and her respectable Irish Catholic family led to a notorious Christchurch infanticide case, with Lyttelton connections.<sup>93</sup> The mother, Sarah Flanagan, was well known in Lyttelton as she had worked for some months as housekeeper of the Mitre Hotel when her brother Michael Flanagan was the landlord. When she arrived to be held in Lyttelton Gaol there was huge interest in the town.<sup>94</sup>

It is not possible to establish the amount of premarital sexual activity in Lyttelton, but it is likely that the informal regulation of a small community where everyone knew everyone else's business had a slight deterrent effect. Evidence of illegitimacy only appeared intermittently in the sources surveyed, suggesting many women did all they could to conceal their situation. Oral evidence tells of the constraining effect of scandal in a small town where gossip would do the rounds very quickly.<sup>95</sup> Evidence of premarital sex and illegitimate births in Lyttelton sometimes made it into court but cases of this kind were not frequent, as women and families involved had no wish to make it public. An unmarried pregnancy brought shame for the family as well as a loss of respectability for the woman herself. In the Sarah Flanagan case, seemingly, her family's concern about their position in the community was a significant issue. An unusual case heard in March 1883 shows how one family attempted to deal with the matter. Robert Williamson was charged with neglecting to provide for his illegitimate child while also intending to desert the child.<sup>96</sup> The case was at the instigation of Captain Schenkel, the father of the woman involved, and was contrary to the wishes of his wife. Significantly, neither Mrs Schenkel nor her daughter appeared in court, suggesting they were attempting to keep some dignity in the face of the public exposure of the matter. Nonetheless, the proceedings took place after the child's birth, so the matter may already have been public knowledge. It appears that Miss Schenkel was of a respectable family, and that her acquaintance with the father of her child came about through his position as mate on the *Prince Alfred*, a barquentine under the command of her father Captain Schenkel. Captain Schenkel was the complainant in the case and his daughter is not mentioned by name

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>93</sup> Dalley, 'Criminal Conversations', pp. 74-75.

<sup>94</sup> *The Press*, 14 January 1891, p. 5, 15 January 1891, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> Such was the stigma of women's unmarried pregnancies in Lyttelton in the twentieth century that the women involved usually left town. Shirley McEwan, interview with the author, 7 July 2005.

<sup>96</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 8 March 1883, p. 3.

in the court proceedings. The evidence suggests that despite the circumstances of the daughter's pregnancy, the family had been dealing with the matter amicably.

Captain Schenkel stated that the defendant had 'told him in July last of the matter, in which he acknowledged he was concerned, and asked for forgiveness. Defendant had said that though he could not marry the girl, as he had no means, he would do so after he got on, and he would see that the child did not want.'<sup>97</sup> The promise had encouraged Captain Schenkel to take him back as mate in September. However, in January, according to Schenkel, Williamson had gone back on his word and said Schenkel 'could bear all the scandal himself about his daughter', as he was going to 'clear out to Sydney and would not maintain the child any longer.'<sup>98</sup> The defence argued that Williamson had contributed to the child's support and had expressed his continued willingness to do so. Williamson himself denied that he had planned to stop supporting the child. 'He had been annoyed at Captain Schenkel telling people in Lyttelton about the matter, and...said he would have to leave Lyttelton, but continue to support the child'.<sup>99</sup> A letter was read in court, from Mrs Schenkel to Williamson, 'in which she entirely dissented from the action her husband had taken, in "dragging her daughter and her babe through the mire of the Resident Magistrate's Court." She wished the defendant success wherever he went, and remarked that he had always kept his promises as to supporting the child, and had been "perfectly honourable".' The judgment was made in Williamson's favour as it was considered there was no evidence that he had intended to desert the child or failed to contribute to its maintenance.<sup>100</sup> This case shows that single motherhood was not simply a route to disgrace, and that families could make the best of it. In this case the father of the child felt the harm to his reputation that was caused by word being spread and his apparent failure to ensure the respectability of a pregnant single woman, let alone provide for the maintenance of her child. Yet marriage itself did not ensure respectability, as the next section explores.

### **Disorderly Relationships**

James Belich notes that women who lived within disreputable subcultures, whether they were prostitutes or not, were living by the norms of their particular

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

community, even if it diverged from the norms of the majority.<sup>101</sup> Lyttelton women often had to contend with husbands absent at sea and this had implications for the way they conducted their lives, and perhaps affected norms that governed their relationships with other men. Evidence of the doings of the ‘rougher’ sort in Lyttelton shows women who drank, socialized with men, and on the whole lived cheerfully ‘unrespectable’ lives.<sup>102</sup> A court case from 1880 reveals the experience of one Sarah McKenzie who appeared to have had some disregard for respectability, but still attempted to represent herself in a respectable light when necessary. William Sinclair had been charged with being found in her house ‘at night without lawful excuse’, at a time when her husband was away at sea.<sup>103</sup>

Nocturnal disturbances seemed to be a common event for Sarah McKenzie. She described being awoken by a noise at the door and a window being broken and opened but expressed little surprise. She thought it was her husband and ‘so took no notice’.<sup>104</sup> The intruder was Sinclair, a man with whom it would appear she was well acquainted, for he came upstairs and attempted to make her get up and have a drink with him. Sarah claimed she had threatened to call the neighbours if he did not leave, and very properly reported the matter to the police and to her husband when he returned home. Under cross-examination she admitted she had been out drinking that evening yet had claimed she returned home alone and was not drunk. Sinclair had, she said, been to her house before with her husband, and also alone, but never into her bedroom.<sup>105</sup> However a witness, Emma Neilson, a neighbour whose bedroom adjoined the McKenzie’s, rather ruined Sarah’s attempts to portray herself as a virtuous wife. She claimed that ‘[h]er attention was attracted by hearing more noise than usual in McKenzie’s room’, with the sounds of struggling and a man and woman’s voice. Under cross-examination she stated that had heard men’s voices in McKenzie’s house while he was away and knew Sinclair had been there before: ‘There was often a little merriment at McKenzie’s...Was disturbed once by a man

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<sup>101</sup> Belich, *Making Peoples*, p. 428.

<sup>102</sup> It is perhaps too easy to make assumptions about the degrading, difficult and unhappy circumstances of women who lacked respectability. Alice Tyro, speaking of residents of a notoriously unrespectable area in early twentieth-century Lyttelton, made a connection between their lack of respectability and their enjoyment of life: ‘some hard case families lived up there, but then again we thought they were hard case but they were just people who enjoyed themselves. You know, I mean years ago, because they enjoyed themselves they were um they were criticized.’ Alice Tyro, interview with the author, 11 July 2005.

<sup>103</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 6 September 1880, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

knocking at her door, who was there evidently in mistake.’<sup>106</sup> Sarah McKenzie’s evidence was further undermined by the revelation that an acquaintance, George Johnson, had seen her earlier that evening very drunk on the street, in the company of a man. Johnson had taken her home and as she could not find her key, broke a window at her request to let her in. He stated that after leaving her at her home he had met Sinclair going towards her house. Unsurprisingly the Bench dismissed the case against Sinclair, but warned him to keep away from the house.<sup>107</sup>

As has been shown, alcohol abuse was closely linked to women’s crime and prostitution but drinking was also part of the leisure practices of working-class women. This could affect claims to respectability although much depended on the judgment of an observer. Alcohol was cheap, had concentrated nutritional values, and was a necessity in the face of insufficient clean water supplies.<sup>108</sup> Beer had long been part of the British working-class diet.<sup>109</sup> Women’s public excessive drinking was frowned upon, but what constituted respectable or unrespectable patterns of alcohol consumption varied among different groups. Lyttelton working-class women drank in their own homes or homes of friends, and sometimes in the streets or hotels. Although in the late nineteenth century the serious concern expressed over social order and respectability had the issue of ‘the demon drink’ at the center of the discussions, for many, drinking was a normal part of life.<sup>110</sup> It is difficult to determine nineteenth-century working-class women’s attitudes to those in their community who indulged in alcohol but oral discourses can give some insight. Born in 1846, Sophia Spore died aged 89 in Lyttelton and is remembered by her granddaughter as ‘a little short lady, used to like her drink gin. They were great drinkers the Irish. Specially the women, for some reason...quite heavy drinkers.’<sup>111</sup> Her purchase of alcohol is remembered: ‘She had what they called a square rigger, which she used to go down and fill, get filled, take home.’<sup>112</sup> The same informant reports that her husband’s mother was also Irish and had a similar fondness for gin.<sup>113</sup> Popular beliefs about the Irish may have contributed to a readiness to connect drinking to the Irish community in Lyttelton. As

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Eldred-Grigg, pp. 59-60.

<sup>109</sup> Kirkby, p. 61.

<sup>110</sup> Claire Toynebee, *Her Work and His: Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930* (Wellington, 1995), p. 164.

<sup>111</sup> Tyro, interview.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

the court reports showed, however, drinking and drunkenness were a visible part of life in the town among working people and unlikely to be confined to those of Irish descent. Accounts from the turn of the century tell of women's social activities where they would gather at one woman's home for supper, some songs and a drink of beer.<sup>114</sup> Yet, women were also represented as victims of men's alcoholism: 'Terrible lot of them used to drink terribly, and some of the women had a very, very hard time of it...My father and that he was he'd have his drink and all but he was never abusive to my mother'.<sup>115</sup> Such relationships were potentially harming to women's respectability.

Women in unsatisfactory relationships might be perceived to be unrespectable themselves, but the censure was often directed towards their husbands if they failed to fulfill their responsibilities. Colonial officials often saw women's problems as a consequence of men's failure to provide.<sup>116</sup> Judgment given in a case in 1880 shows that the judge was intent on establishing the patriarchal ideal. Ann Parks charged her husband with failing to provide for her and her family. Although Ann's behaviour was hardly exemplary, this did not prevent her getting a fair hearing in court. The defendant had married her three years before but had only stayed home for a day, and shortly after was sent to prison for three months for vagrancy. When released he stayed at home with her for only a short time and she stated she had only received financial support between October 1878 and March 1879. He claimed 'he never could get into the house after he was married as the complainant was living with another man, and she drove him away when he went...The complainant, on being called said the reason she would not let the defendant into the house was that he always went there drunk and created a disturbance.'<sup>117</sup> The case concluded three days later with a police constable supporting the wife's evidence that eleven months earlier he had had to remove the defendant from her premises. A witness Robert Baxter appeared for the defendant and stated that he had known him in Scotland and he was a married man with three children. However, the Bench refused to receive this evidence 'as it was of no value to them affecting the present case'. The defendant claimed 'that he was the father to only one of the three children complainant had had since he married her' yet this allegation had no effect. He was ordered to pay ten shillings per week for the

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<sup>114</sup> Summerton, interview.

<sup>115</sup> Irene Anderson, interview with the author, 10 August 2005.

<sup>116</sup> Tennant, *Paupers and Providers*, p. 104.

<sup>117</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 19 June 1880, p. 3.

children's support.<sup>118</sup> Despite evidence of a bigamous marriage and adultery, the issue for the authorities in this case was the necessity of establishing female economic dependence on an appropriate breadwinner, rather than censuring departures from respectability.

Conversely, women who left their husbands were subverting the approved social order. The legal position of married women meant their husbands were liable for their debts so men were forced to publicize the situation. In two cases in the first year of Lyttleton's settlement such women were represented as a danger in the public forum of the newspaper: 'The Wife of the Undersigned having left him, Notice is Hereby Given that he will not be answerable for any debts she may contract. Wm Pallett.'<sup>119</sup> In a notice a month later the quality of a warning is more explicit: 'The Public are Hereby Cautioned against giving credit to Mrs Nankivell, as I will not be answerable for any Debts that may be contracted by her. I also warn the public against purchasing any property, or transacting any kind of business with her, for in every case of this kind legal proceedings will be had recourse to. Robert Nankivell.'<sup>120</sup> In these cases, the respectability of married women who left their husbands was publicly called into question. In contrast, however, to obviously disreputable behaviour such as public drunkenness or prostitution, it is more ambiguous as to whether they were clearly unrespectable. As the century progressed it is possible that there came to be greater acceptance of women's rights and identity outside marriage, in light the changes in women's legal status which are discussed in the next chapter. Nevertheless, women may have lost respectability through the publicity surrounding marriage breakdowns.

In 1893 Kate Seymour left her husband Robert due to his ill treatment of her. In the ensuing court appearances she was required to give evidence that demonstrated her innocence in the face of her husband's abuse, thus justifying her need to leave. It took two court appearances for the judge to grant her request for maintenance for herself and her children. In February, Robert Seymour was charged with assaulting her and at the same time she applied for maintenance and protection of her earnings. Her husband was fined five shillings but a maintenance order was not given.<sup>121</sup> A month later she was in court again and stated 'she had left her husband's house on

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 19 July 1851, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 30 August 1851, p. 8.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 2 February 1893, p. 3.

Jan.3 in consequence of him having assaulted her. He had not committed to her support.'<sup>122</sup> Her husband's evidence of the situation was also considered before the judgment was made. He was ordered to pay ten shillings per week for her support.<sup>123</sup> In this case, Kate Seymour's respectability was on trial as much as her husband was.

Through court cases and publicity women could be given a disreputable status yet there was plenty of room for ambiguity, due to tensions between prevailing and dominant norms of behaviour. Unrespectable behaviour was contextually defined, and definitions depended on the standpoint of the observer. Disreputable women may have accepted that label, but they could also have their own definitions and forms of resistance. 'Bad' women in Lyttelton were generally those who were frequently drunk and disorderly and involved in prostitution. Some were outcast, some not. Representations of women's disreputable behaviour were constructed in terms of the discourses that linked women's transgressions with their occupation of threatening public spaces. Lyttelton did not appear to have a significant criminal class, as distinct or part of a 'rough' element, but there is some evidence of a small disreputable subculture associated with the port. As a small community it may have been difficult for the visibly unrespectable to exist in Lyttelton, in contrast to the larger urban centre of Christchurch.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 2 March 1893, p. 3.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 4

### Ambiguous Respectability: Representations and Perceptions

As the last two chapters have shown, forms and representations of respectability and its opposite were complex and varied with different perspectives and contexts. Hence, there were degrees of respectability or degrees by which women could lack respectability, demonstrating how elusive the concept could be. Although there were absolutes of disreputable behaviour according to the prevailing norms, such as public and excessive drinking, violent or predatory behaviour, or obviously promiscuous sexual activity and prostitution, between these extremes of transgression and obvious respectability there was an area of ambiguity. Women's behaviour and activities could fall within the ambiguous in-between territory; there was no definitive dividing line between respectable and unrespectable. This chapter addresses these grey areas between the 'good' and the 'bad' of women's character and behaviour. Many nineteenth-century Lyttelton women lived practical, energetic lives that were not always in tune with ideals about women's proper place. Much of women's behaviour in Lyttelton was somewhere in between the idealized respectability of domestic femininity and the defiantly unrespectable. Indeed, this ambiguity was not specific to the colonies. In nineteenth-century Britain there was not necessarily consensus about women's proper place. The meanings of 'womanhood' were contested at this time and there was uncertainty about women's position in society.<sup>1</sup>

Women's respectability became ambiguous most often when their circumstances, actions or behaviour caused the division between the domestic realm and public realm to become blurred. Ambiguity in meanings and representations of respectability suggests the tensions that came from the difficulties of reconciling the pervasive ideology of separate spheres with the needs of ordinary women's lives in Lyttelton. Although never the 'dominant reality', separate spheres ideology was significant in forming nineteenth-century individuals' values, and women could not ignore the pressure to meet its ideals.<sup>2</sup> Ambiguous respectability was linked to economic status and related to the contested meanings of social-class specific definitions. As Stevan Eldred-Grigg notes, although many in New Zealand may have

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<sup>1</sup> Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London, 1992), pp. 66-67.

<sup>2</sup> Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900* (London, 1987), pp. 12-13.



adhered to a 'colonial puritanism' it was 'only one moral code among several'.<sup>3</sup> The degree to which the poor could be respectable was questionable, if judged from a middle-class perspective, but forms of respectability could be an element of working-class women's self-identities. 'Rough' women, as discussed in Chapter 3, could adhere to a self-identified respectability, whereas others might label them disreputable.

Recent cultural history approaches have highlighted the complexity and instability of meanings and this applies especially to perceptions and representations of respectability. This approach has seen a focus on the question of women's 'identities' in terms of 'a sense of being that is continually being re-made and is negotiated in relation to a series of "others"' which leads to a sense of the 'complexity of ways in which individuals position themselves in the world'.<sup>4</sup> While the self-consciously respectable might point to touchstones of unrespectable behaviour, in practice respectability was a contingent category determined by context and self-identity. Accordingly, ambiguity could arise from the tensions and contradictions between women's respectability in subjective identity versus their outward representations of themselves in terms of their identity. The perceptions of others might not match one's own.

This chapter begins by considering the mental and physical unsettlement that women experienced in migration and its implications for disrupting ideals of respectability. It then goes on to address aspects of women's lives in Lyttelton where perceptions and representations of respectability were somewhat ambiguous. This was usually related to circumstances that took women outside the home. The blurring of social and spatial boundaries evident in women's public actions and conduct contradicted simplistic definitions of respectable femininity; this is explored with reference to family responsibilities and difficulties, women's participation in the workforce, and community interactions and disputes. The disruption of clear definitions of respectability was complicated further by the ambivalence of women towards its demands. A public appearance of respectability had important implications for social interactions, work, and treatment by authorities, and

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<sup>3</sup> Eldred-Grigg, Stevan, *Pleasures of the Flesh: Sex & Drugs in Colonial New Zealand 1840-1915* (Wellington, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson, 'Introduction: Women's Work, a Cultural History', in *Women and Work Culture: Britain c. 1850-1950*, eds. Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson (Aldershot, 2005), p. 5.

consequently women and men recognized this importance and acted accordingly.<sup>5</sup> Rough women could represent themselves as respectable when the occasion suited, but this did not necessarily mean they were committed to the stringent ideals of respectability in their everyday lives. These different versions of respectability meant that women could engage in behaviour that challenged norms of respectability but still claim a self-identified respectability.

### **Women and Migration**

In 1878 Bessie Macready, the respectable orphaned daughter of a Belfast teacher, arrived in Lyttelton and went to stay with her aunts in the nearby harbour community of Governors Bay. Writing to her cousins from her aunts' cottage she described her situation 'looking out on beds of magnificent flowers, roses, fuchsias, geraniums, etc., with the sea a little beyond...I found my aunts well and hearty, indeed I am quite surprised at the way Aunt Betsy can run up the hills.'<sup>6</sup> Despite her apparent admiration, this remark suggests that Bessie Macready found her aunt's physical capabilities a trifle disconcerting. Respectable women in Britain were not usually to be seen running around the countryside and it is not surprising that her Aunt's behaviour should have made Bessie Macready uneasy. The significance of this episode is that it illustrates how the effect on women of colonial life could involve a reassessment of what constituted respectable female conduct. This was dictated often by the necessity of physical activity on the colonial 'frontier', which may have allowed women to behave in ways not considered 'respectable' in Britain. It has been claimed that '[u]ntil the 1890s the dominant code of respectability for colonial women allowed them to be physically active', as long as they did not make a spectacle of themselves.<sup>7</sup> However, exactly what constituted making a spectacle was not clear. Middle-class women committed to ideals of gentility may have had stricter notions on

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<sup>5</sup> Chris McConville, 'Rough Women, Respectable Men and Social Reform: A Response to Lake's "Masculinism"', *Historical Studies*, 22:88 (1987), p. 439.

<sup>6</sup> Bessie Macready to her Cousins, 27 March 1878, MS-Papers-1553 Northern Ireland Public Record Office Collection D.1757/2/4, ATL.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Brookes, Erik Olssen and Emma Beer, 'Spare Time? Leisure, Gender and Modernity', in *Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890-1939*, eds. Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law (Auckland, 2003), pp. 165-166.

what was acceptable physical activity. The danger of ‘spoiling her hands’ was one of the objections raised by Charlotte Godley’s sisters to her voyage to New Zealand.<sup>8</sup>

Historians have most readily seen contested meanings of respectability in terms of middle-class women’s responses to colonial life and the potential for freedom from older constraints on women’s behaviour. In this interpretation, some middle-class women’s adaptations and reactions to colonial life entailed a redefinition of respectability, which allowed for a more flexible interpretation of what behaviour was appropriate for women. James Belich suggests that genteel women could work and travel more without loss of status.<sup>9</sup> Jean Garner wrote that Charlotte Godley was able ‘to take opportunities for travel’ because ‘she lived in Canterbury before definitions of appropriate activities for a lady hardened’.<sup>10</sup> However, her travel opportunities may well have had more to do with her class position and her husband’s official role than an overall relaxation of the constraints on women and a renegotiable respectability. The potential for colonial ‘liberation’ was restricted in Lyttelton, especially for working-class women. Despite claims for the ‘freeing’ effect of the colonial context the ideal of respectability was always important in the town, and the initial settlement period did not necessarily allow for lessening of constraints on women and hence expanded opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

Like Bessie Macready’s Aunt Betsy at Governors Bay, Lyttelton women, especially in the early years of settlement, often lived very physical lives. Although Lyttelton, unlike some other New Zealand colonial settlements, did not need to be hacked out of the bush, women’s lot was nevertheless a relentless round of domestic toil, often without assistance, and Lyttelton’s geography of steep streets and gullies meant tasks such as fetching and carrying water could be strenuous indeed. This aspect of women’s colonial life in Lyttelton had important implications in terms of middle-class women’s respectability, encompassing effects on the physical body as well as a mental adjustment. For women, particularly those of the class unused to such physical work, their respectable identity was bound up with bodily restraint. Margaret

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<sup>8</sup> Eveline C. Godley, ‘Charlotte Godley: An Impression’, in *Letters from Early New Zealand by Charlotte Godley 1850-1853*, ed. John R. Godley (Christchurch, 1951), p. xviii.

<sup>9</sup> James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland, 2001), pp. 20-21.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Garner, ‘The First “First Lady”: Charlotte Godley 1821-1907’, in *Remembering Godley: A Portrait of Canterbury’s Founder* ed. Mark Stocker (Christchurch, 2001), p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> Melanie Nolan has seen only limited possibilities for women’s emancipation in the early colonial period. Melanie Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State* (Christchurch, 2000), p. 29.

McClure has argued that discourses about the body abounded in colonial New Zealand, with the fit energetic body of the working man associated with the rewards of the new world.<sup>12</sup> While for some men, the heroic healthy body was often a symbol of well-being and new identity, the reality of heavy work created a more ambivalent situation for women, some of whom were less likely to romanticize it and may have felt the loss of former status keenly.<sup>13</sup> Arguments for women's escape from old world constraints on behaviour in a colonial context often stress the physical freedoms women could enjoy, with the physical activity and energy of work on a frontier creating a kind of physical emancipation.<sup>14</sup> More apparent, however, were the continuities of experience for working-class women for whom relentless household tasks were already accepted. Women not used to physical work had to come to terms with how such work fitted with ideas held about their respectability and status; personal renegotiations of a respectable identity varied depending on class and social position. The developing myths of the 'pioneer' had a role to play in elevating the status of work. Men felt respect for physically demanding work, and working with one's hands could give pleasure and a sense of worth.<sup>15</sup> Middle-class women were perceived to gain self-respect through their unaccustomed toil.<sup>16</sup> However, women who had happily 'made do' in the early years of settlement may have considered domestic work demeaning by the 1880s with the end of the migration phase.<sup>17</sup> However, the question remains whether women's enjoyment of the physical dimensions of their new life contributed to ambivalent feelings about whether respectable femininity needed to be expressed through passive inactivity. The

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret McClure, 'Body and Soul: Heroic Visions of Work in the Late Nineteenth Century', in *Fragments: New Zealand Social & Cultural History*, eds. Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum (Auckland, 2000), p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-104. The capacity of relentless domestic toil to 'diminish' women's lives rather than emancipate has been noted, see Frances Porter, and Charlotte Macdonald eds. *'My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates': The unsettled lives of women in nineteenth-century New Zealand as revealed to sisters, family and friends* (Auckland, 1996), pp. 146-147.

<sup>14</sup> Jane Maria Atkinson's pleasure in the physical work of housekeeping and 'scrambling' in the bush is one of the more well known examples of this, see Porter and Macdonald, pp. 89-90.

<sup>15</sup> Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male – A History* (Auckland, 1987), pp. 15-17.

<sup>16</sup> Helen M. Simpson, *The Women of New Zealand* (Wellington, 1940), pp. 112-116.

<sup>17</sup> This point is made with regard to Jane Maria Atkinson, who in 1870 was indignant when her correspondent imagined she was still doing without servants, Porter and Macdonald, p. 147.

potential of ‘bodily pleasure’ to upset ‘cultures of constraint’ cannot be underestimated.<sup>18</sup>

### **Ambiguities of Respectability from Marriage**

The ideal of respectable marriage was not always the reality for Lyttelton women and their respectability could be affected when this norm broke down, and behaviour in the private domestic realm became a public issue. A woman’s identity was linked to her husband’s both in contemporary understanding and in their legal position in the nineteenth century. As in Britain, married women in New Zealand at the beginning of the colonial period were under the common law jurisdiction of *coverture* and had no legal identity separate from their husband.<sup>19</sup> Women could gain respectability in marriage, but unsatisfactory husbands often left them vulnerable. Women married to men who drank to excess, failed to provide, or who were physically abusive had to fight to maintain their respectability. Although the courts could be sympathetic to women in such situations, in the absence of divorce and with limited options available for them to earn a living, especially if they had children to care for, women had few means of escape from an unsatisfactory marriage.

However, changes relating to laws on married women’s property during the second half of the nineteenth century made it easier for women to help themselves in such situations and represented a significant shift in the legal view of marriage.<sup>20</sup> Women in Lyttelton actively laid claim to respectability by demanding appropriate redress in court, and establishing themselves as the injured party. Women living independently of male support included deserted wives and widows as well as women separated from abusive or drunken partners. These situations were problematic for women’s respectability because they could become dependent on charity and represented unsettling alternatives to the male-headed family unit. The push toward self-help in New Zealand, combined with the assumption of women’s dependence on men, made women without a breadwinner a complication in the eyes of authorities.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Caroline Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure: Reshaping and Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900-1960* (Auckland, 2003), p. 10. For a discussion of ‘the body’ as a gendered discursive construction rather than a passive medium see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> Bettina Bradbury, ‘From Civil Death to Separate Property: Changes in the Legal Rights of Married Women in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand’, *NZJH*, 29:1 (1995), p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Tennant, *Paupers and Providers: Charitable Aid in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1989), pp. 103-104.

Women in this situation were always potentially unrespectable, although on the hierarchy of respectability or the 'deserving' amongst recipients of aid, widows ranked highest, with deserted wives at the bottom. Although desertion was recognized as a legitimate problem in colonial New Zealand, deserted wives had an ambiguous status as they carried some of the blame for their position.<sup>22</sup> However, the prevalence of desertion had impact on the development of women's legal status in New Zealand. In 1860 an act was passed which allowed a deserted wife to apply to have her future income or property protected, against seizure by her husband's creditors or claims from her husband if he returned.<sup>23</sup> In the 1870s further changes under the act allowed women whose husbands who failed to provide, drank or beat them to seek to have their earnings protected, and to claim support from their husband in the form of maintenance payments. This allowed women who were not intimidated about going to court or raising children by themselves to leave their husbands.<sup>24</sup> The culmination of these legal changes was the 1884 Married Women's Property Act, which allowed women to maintain separate property within marriage, control their own wages and run their own businesses.<sup>25</sup>

Lyttelton women took advantage of the laws to protect themselves and their interests, and actively attempted to maintain their respectability even as their status as an abused, separated, or deserted wife made this problematic. Newspaper reports made their circumstances public knowledge, and revealed details of women's struggles with difficult partners, which in some cases spanned years. Mary Ann Durham's husband John Durham had a drinking problem that lasted more than a decade. His deteriorating condition and growing dependence on drink is apparent in press reports, but the psychological toll on Mary Ann Durham over the years is not so clear. Between 1866 and 1882 she had eight children, six of whom survived, and it is apparent that she was working to support her family.<sup>26</sup> She took her husband to court when he was physically abusive or when he failed to meet his commitments for her and her children's support. In April 1869 she charged him with assaulting her. It was

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>23</sup> Bradbury, p. 51. For example, in June 1890 Mrs J.E.E Barnes applied under the Married Women's Property Act for an order protecting her earnings from her husband, Garnet Barnes, a commercial traveller. He did not appear in Court. The order was granted and he was bound over to keep the peace, *Lyttelton Times*, 26 June 1890, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Bradbury, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

<sup>26</sup> Church Register Index Card Catalogue, Christchurch Public Library.

reported ‘that on Thursday evening last, on returning home, she found him lying on the floor drunk. He got up and abused her, and struck her several times in the face and breast. He was a quiet man when sober, but when he got drunk he abused her.’<sup>27</sup> Women’s fear for themselves was one motive for taking such cases to court, but they also hoped that the legal judgment, whether a fine or being bound over to keep the peace, could have some coercive effect. Concerns with respectability may have prevented some women taking this course but such incidents were not easily hidden in the Lyttelton community. Mary Ann Durham’s neighbours were already aware of her difficulties as she had gone to the police station after the abuse saying she was afraid to go home and was advised by the Sergeant to go to neighbours for the night.<sup>28</sup> Concerns with respectability may have had less significance for women who felt physically threatened. However, in spite of her status as victim Mary Ann Durham’s character was also judged in court when the verdict for her husband was considered. The Bench stated that it was ‘notorious that the accused was habitually drunk. His wife bore an excellent character.’ He was fined 20 shillings and costs and required to find sureties, two of £20, and £40 himself, for his better behaviour.<sup>29</sup>

Ten years later John Durham was still drinking heavily and failing to provide for his family. Between January and September 1880 he was summoned to court on eight separate occasions. The first charges involved his failure to support his family, and he promised to abstain from drink, and was warned not to appear in court again.<sup>30</sup> This warning seemed to have no effect as on 6 February he was charged with failing to support his wife and family.<sup>31</sup> Later that same month he made another appearance: ‘His wife said he had taken the pledge, and the Magistrate dismissed the case, telling the defendant that if he came up again on the same charge he would receive the heaviest punishment the law allowed.’<sup>32</sup> On 7 April Mrs Durham charged him again with neglecting to maintain her family and also applied for protection of her earnings and an order for the support of her children, requests which were granted by the court.<sup>33</sup> In June he was charged once for drunkenness, and in July with being £2 in arrears with the maintenance of his family, and was again brought to court by his

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<sup>27</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 27 April 1869, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 January 1880, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 February 1880, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 February 1880, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 April 1880, p. 3.

wife.<sup>34</sup> This catalogue of offences was brought to an end only by a prison sentence. In early September John Durham was charged with not obeying the court order to provide for his family, and at his non appearance, a warrant was issued for his arrest.<sup>35</sup> In court his wife reported that he had been drunk every morning before nine o'clock. 'The Bench read out a long list of previous convictions for drunkenness and other offences, and said they were determined to put him somewhere for a time where he could get no drink.'<sup>36</sup> His excesses came to an end in 1883 when he committed suicide 'while in state of temporary insanity'.<sup>37</sup> The implications of widowhood for Mrs Durham may have been a continued struggle to maintain respectability.<sup>38</sup>

When threatened by a violent spouse, women often actively sought help from neighbours or the police, running to them if physically threatened for example. However, Jennifer Davis found in her study of the London Police Courts, that for 'women who attached some importance to outward displays of respectability the decision to involve the police and the courts in domestic disputes was difficult.'<sup>39</sup> A concern with respectability could make women less likely to want to act against their husbands in court. In 1865 charges were withdrawn against Hugh Higgings from Head of the Bay in Lyttelton harbour when his wife Alice declined to prosecute him for assault.<sup>40</sup> Women in such situations laid charges as a means of control but may have not wanted to take it any further as the consequences of a fine or gaol term for the husband was possible further destitution for the wife. Women might also fear an exposure of their husband's conduct could cause their children to be viewed with prejudice by others.<sup>41</sup> However, a woman could be viewed with sympathy, especially if her neighbours were aware of the abuse she was suffering. Lyttelton houses were often quite close together so neighbours were in a position to know if domestic fights occurred and could also be willing to intervene. In May 1870 Mr E. Cannell's abuse of his wife caused the neighbours to step in. Cannell was charged as consequence of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 5 July 1880, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 4 September 1880, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6 September 1880, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Church Register Index Card Catalogue, Christchurch Public Library.

<sup>38</sup> Katie Pickle's study of widowhood in a Nova Scotia county in the nineteenth century found that despite potential freedom it more often signalled a life stage of uncertainty and dependence, Katie Pickles, 'Locating widows in mid-nineteenth century Pictou County, Nova Scotia', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30 (2004), pp. 70-86.

<sup>39</sup> Jennifer Davis, 'A Poor Man's System of Justice: The London Police Courts in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century', *Historical Journal*, 27: 2 (1984), p. 320.

<sup>40</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 16 May 1865, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Patricia Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation* (Ringwood, 1994), p. 172.



concerned neighbours who talked to the police ‘fearing something serious might happen’.<sup>42</sup> In court the ‘Bench said it was a matter of notoriety the disturbances that took place in defendant’s house.’ Cannell was told he must not ill-use his wife or police would intervene.<sup>43</sup>

Husbands who did not provide for their families could make their wives’ respectability ambiguous in consequence. The Lyttelton Orphanage, situated in a prominent position to the west of the town, catered not only for orphans but could also admit children of parents who could not support them, or care for them. Evidence from elsewhere suggests charity workers would encourage women struggling to support their children to put them in an orphanage. A charity worker in Brisbane suggested to a woman that an orphanage would give her daughters the schooling they were lacking.<sup>44</sup> However the Lyttelton Orphanage was referred to as a ‘blot’ by a correspondent in 1885: ‘Though called an Orphanage, it is more a home for destitute and illegitimate children, the far larger number, say 70 per cent, having one or both parents living.’<sup>45</sup> Women who had their children admitted to the orphanage, whatever their circumstances, could be judged harshly, given the contemporary opinion that children should properly be supported within that family, not by the state. Though the information recorded in the Lyttelton Orphanage Committee Minute Books is fragmentary, it reveals something of the circumstances of mothers who placed their children there.<sup>46</sup> There were respectable but unfortunately circumstanced women working hard to support their children, and others potentially not so respectable who were unable or unwilling to do so. The Orphanage expected some contribution to the keep of the children if their mother was living. When left a widow, Sarah Buchanan struggled to support herself and family history reports that her son George spent time in the orphanage, but for how long is unknown.<sup>47</sup>

The respectability of women whose children were deemed neglected or uncontrolled was also ambiguous. A mother who was unable to control her children could apply to have them sent to the industrial school but she might receive little

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<sup>42</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 14 May 1870.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Grimshaw, p. 129.

<sup>45</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 25 July 1885, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Lyttelton Orphanage Committee Minutes Books, 1885-1890, Archives New Zealand, Christchurch Branch.

<sup>47</sup> Shirley McEwan, interview with the author, 7 July 2005. See further comments on Sarah Buchanan’s circumstances in Chapter 2.

sympathy in doing so. One mother asked that her two boys of 10 and 14 years old, up on a charge of larceny of firewood, be sent to the industrial school and the training school respectively; they 'were running wild beyond her control, and the step-father took no interest in their welfare. The Bench said they were unwilling to send the boys to the Schools, and burden the State with their maintenance, as their mother was able to provide for their keep.'<sup>48</sup> However there was a different outcome when Bessie Lester, a widow, applied for her eleven year old son Thomas to be sent to the Burnham Industrial School. He was 'past her control' and she had three other children and a job cleaning the railway offices that meant she had to leave home very early in the morning. 'Constable McCormack corroborated the statement that the child was a most unruly one. An order was made for the child to be committed to Burnham, to be brought up in the Church of England faith.'<sup>49</sup>

## Work

Although women's respectable work within the confines of home and family accounted for a considerable proportion of work done by women, many Lyttelton women undertook paid employment outside the home - work which took them into ambiguous spaces. As Melanie Nolan argues, the cult of domesticity was partly a myth, for women made up 25 percent of the total New Zealand paid workforce in 1891, and about 39 percent of women aged between fifteen and 24, mostly single women, were in paid employment.<sup>50</sup> While the majority of women's occupations such as domestic service, teaching and nursing were an extension of their traditional nurturing role, some employment pushed the boundaries of appropriate femininity. Widowhood also played a part in women's employment choices; the need to support themselves and their children affected whether they were able to maintain a respectable front. This section considers whether women in less acceptable occupations could maintain or lose their respectability. Employment that entailed a degree of public visibility was likely to be more problematic in this way, and the question to consider is what effect women's public roles had on their respectability.

Lyttelton Civil Court records are a useful source for showing women active in Lyttelton businesses. The records of civil litigation in New Zealand, in contrast to

<sup>48</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 19 October 1880, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 November 1893, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Melanie Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State* (Christchurch, 2000), pp. 33, 67-68.

criminal court proceedings, have not been used to any significant extent in explorations of women's history, and have potential for future studies. I have used the *Plaint Books*, which are mostly complete between 1868 and 1893, to get an overview of women's business dealings. These actions were mostly concerned with chasing debts or settling disputes over wages, damages and the like. Women appeared as both plaintiffs and defendants but a detailed account of the proceedings was not recorded. The source must be used with caution, as the quality of the information is variable and often incomplete.<sup>51</sup> Details of the judgment are not always recorded, spelling of names is variable, and women's occupations are recorded on some occasions but on another they might be simply recorded as 'widow'.

Women's actions make up a small proportion of all the cases recorded but when taken as a whole it is possible to identify trends. Widows make up the majority of plaintiffs but they were also present as defendants. Women's occupations that occur most frequently are boarding house keepers and hotelkeepers, followed by domestic servants and hotel employees such as cooks. Other occupations represented were washerwomen, laundresses, greengrocers, dressmakers and matrons. The role of hotelkeepers will be considered in more detail, but the prominence of this occupation attests to the opportunity it offered women to play a public business role, and to the significance of the hotel trade in Lyttelton. The similar high number of boarding house keepers also reflected the importance of this occupation for widows and the opportunities of the port location for this means of earning a living. Women's business relationships raise issues of how they were seen by men, as fellow business people, perhaps in contrast to how they were seen by women who did not have to enter the world of paid work. Was there a pecking order of respectability amongst women in terms of their employment? Was it seen as a legitimate independence? Did it affect how they socialized with other women? Significant perhaps, is whether how were they seen by others affected how they saw themselves in terms of their respectability. In most cases these questions are difficult to answer.

Whether women's appearances in the civil court harmed their respectability is another interesting question and one for which there is probably no clear answer. A number of factors were involved, such as whether women were plaintiffs or

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<sup>51</sup> *Plaint Books 1868-1893*, Lyttelton Magistrate's Court Records, Archives New Zealand, Christchurch Branch. Around three months of proceedings from 1881 are unreadable due to the bad state of preservation of one of the books.

defendants; who won the case; what came to light in the proceedings and how this reflected on their reputation. A study of women's civil litigation in Elizabethan England suggested that women might have thought twice about going to law for fear of making private matters public and so harming their reputation.<sup>52</sup> Female businesswomen were probably less likely to harm their respectability by appearing in civil actions if they were already well respected in the community. Widows often had considerable property and business interests to protect, and so civil actions could be a necessary part of their business activities. However, a public exposure of financial troubles had potential to harm a women's reputation and women whose businesses were less reputable risked bringing questionable business dealings to light. Appearances for widows represented a range of circumstances and degrees of respectability. The hotelkeeper Mary Moynihan's various appearances between 1876 and 1893 suggests her active and prominent business role, which likely brought with it status and a degree of self-identified respectability. In contrast, Alicia Townsend, a widow since 1866, made only a single appearance, as plaintiff in 1870.<sup>53</sup> As a wealthy middle-class widow in her seventies, the civil action arose from her need to protect her considerable property assets rather than being a result of business activity.<sup>54</sup> Civil actions could also graphically illustrate a loss of respectability. In 1879 Susan De Costa was on the verge of bankruptcy and among a number of other actions, in April she was charged by a Christchurch tobacconist with issuing dishonest cheques.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to Lyttelton's active businesswomen, lower status women, whether single women or widows, may have been more at risk by going to court. In cases where women chased unpaid wages, the balance of power was often in their employer's favour, as the dispute might reflect badly on them, and harm their respectable character and their hopes of future employment. Between 1868 and 1893 there were less than ten identifiable cases of female employees using the civil court to settle disputes over wages. Most of the women involved were employed in hotels, or domestic service of some kind. Although there appeared to be an even split between cases lost and won by women, it is perhaps significant that in one of the latter, the

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<sup>52</sup> Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 223.

<sup>53</sup> *Plaint Books*, 24 December 1870.

<sup>54</sup> Alicia Townsend died in 1872 leaving a significant amount of property, four rural land sections and Town section 6 on Norwich Quay in Lyttelton. Her estate was worth in the region of one thousand three hundred pounds Alicia Townsend, 1872 Probate CHA231/1872, Archives New Zealand, Christchurch Branch.

<sup>55</sup> *Plaint Books*, 25 April 1879.

plaintiff Emma Humphreys was a barmaid, an occupation that involved a degree of assertiveness and public visibility.<sup>56</sup> That judgments were made regularly in favour of female employees indicates that the courts respected the rights of women to defend their interests. However, there could be a connection between women lacking respectability and frequent appearances as defendants. Such women were often in a vulnerable position. Harriet Meade, who in 1875 was charged with drunkenness and considered to be a prostitute was probably the same Mrs Meade who appeared in two civil actions in 1874 and 1875, charged by the Council with not paying the Education Rate.<sup>57</sup> She was recorded as a widow in one case and a washerwoman in another and the loss of respectability can be linked to financial difficulties associated with her widowhood.

Women's court actions represented only one aspect of the public role they played in Lyttelton, and it could be said that women risked their respectability by public activities which conflicted with Victorian ideology's 'voice of propriety which sought to define them within an exclusively domestic environment'.<sup>58</sup> Concern with respectability was an important consideration for most economically active women, but it was negotiated through their roles as employers and employees, which were affected by their own circumstances and the culture and attitudes of the Lyttelton community. Similar issues affected men concerned with their business responsibilities, which shows how gendered versions of respectability may have converged in this context. I have graphed the data from the civil court material to give an overview of women's litigation and business activities. I had hoped initially that this approach could reveal trends over time with regard to women's changing business roles, and have implications for wider issues of women's respectability. I was interested as to whether opportunities for women to be active in business decreased as the era of migration gave way to a more settled community. However, I came to realize that wider issues affected patterns of litigation, such as the general economic climate in Lyttelton and the changing nature of business transactions in the colony. Data from civil actions cannot be used to make any conclusive statements about attitudes to women and women's public business activities with regard to

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 15 October 1874.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 13 May 1874, 18 February 1875. See Chapter 3.

<sup>58</sup> Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, p. 82.

respectability. Nevertheless, it is still a useful source, especially when used in conjunction with other material.<sup>59</sup>

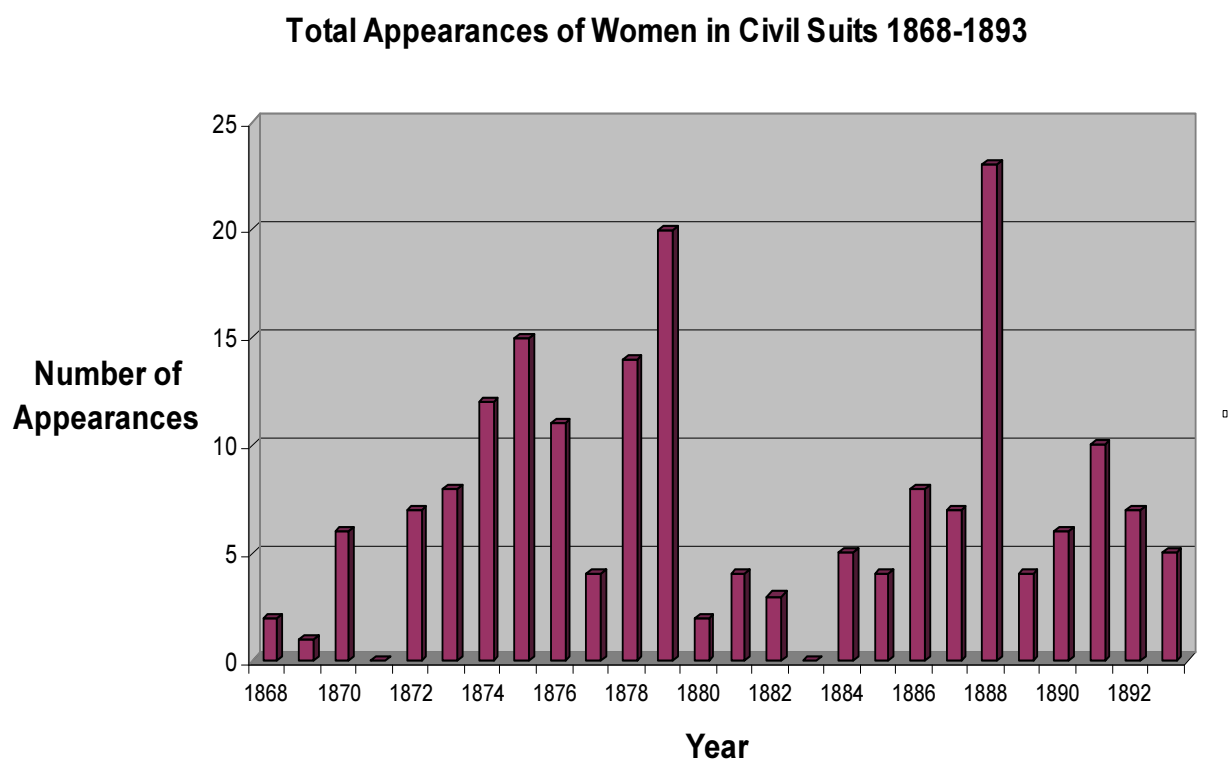
The graphs show the number of actions involving women by year. Each time a woman appeared in court was counted as a single action and if she was involved in several actions on the same day each of these were also counted individually. Graph 1 represents all actions where women were involved between 1868 and 1893. Sometimes cases involved women as both plaintiffs and defendants, and in this instance this has been counted as two actions, one for each woman. Graph 2 shows numbers of distinct individual women involved in civil actions over the period. Graphs 3 and 4 show women's appearances as plaintiffs and defendants separately.

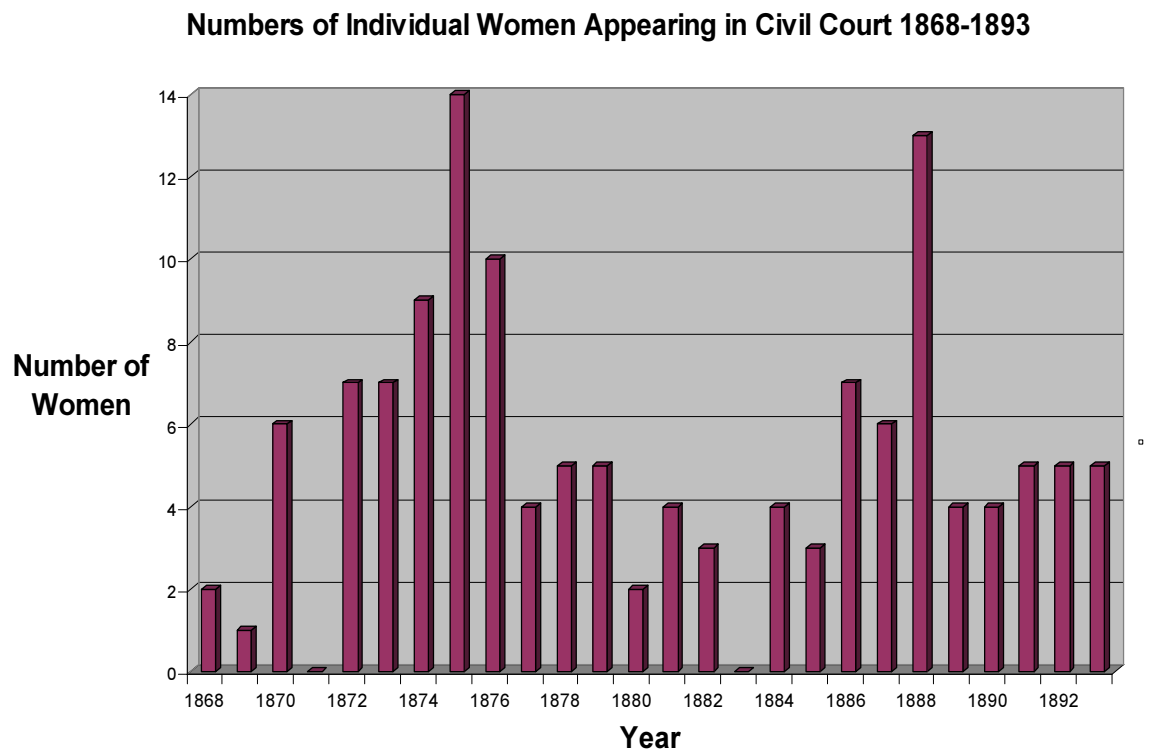
Overall, what the graphs reveal is that women's appearances in civil court fluctuated over the twenty-five year period, but with a noticeable increase in the 1870s and a drop in the first half of the 1880s, paralleling broader trends in total civil suits.<sup>60</sup> However, the small numbers of women involved means the data has limitations. In some instances an apparent increase in women's activity in the court was the result of one woman's circumstances. For example, high numbers of cases in 1878 and 1879 were due to the large number of actions by and against Susan De Costa who was on the verge of bankruptcy. She was the only woman to appear as a defendant in 1878 and 1879 with eighteen actions taken against her, and she was a plaintiff six times during the two years. Graph 2 shows that women continued to be active in civil courts in the late 1880s and early 1890s although the numbers involved were small. Women were slightly more likely to appear as plaintiffs than defendants, but there is no significant difference between graphs 3 and 4. 1888 was a busy year for female plaintiffs, but one woman was responsible for lifting the number, with Mary Baxter's actions making up eight out of the sixteen cases. Women's civil actions in Lyttelton show their practical responses to the challenges of employment and business. Their readiness to be involved in civil litigation suggests that the public/private spheres dichotomy in historiography is not useful when considering

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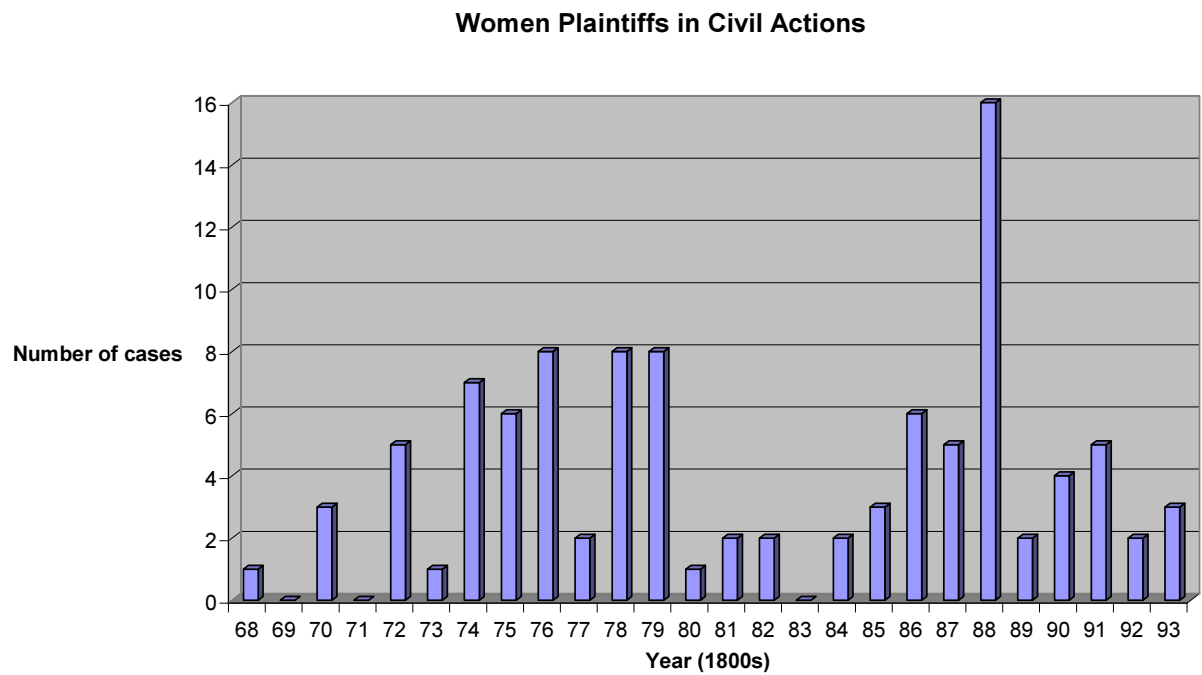
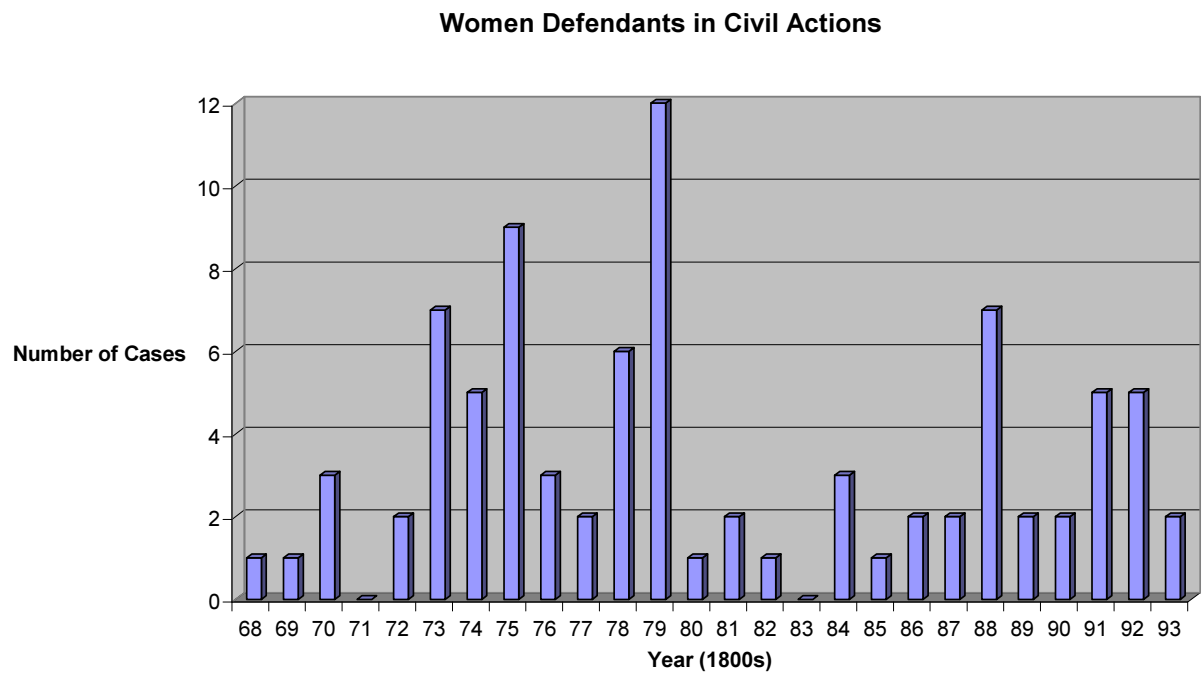
<sup>59</sup> Sarah Buchanan's one and only appearance in civil litigation, as a defendant in an 1876 case involving unpaid rent, confirms family knowledge of her financial struggles in widowhood. See Introduction.

<sup>60</sup> Miles Fairburn's graph of civil litigation in colonial New Zealand shows an increase in civil actions in the 1860s and the late 1870s, then a general decline from the 1880s, Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900* (Auckland, 1989), pp. 226.

**Graph 1**

**Graph 2**



**Graph 3****Graph 4**

women as independent economic actors. Above all, it is not clear that involvement in civil litigation compromised the respectability of women any more than it did men.

The civil court data can tell us what particular women's occupations were at a certain time, and the sparse details can even give some hints as to their business success, or alternatively their financial struggles. What it cannot address are the circumstances and motivations behind women's employment choices. Did concerns with status and respectability have a role in the types of work women were willing to do, or could women consider that the colonial situation demanded adaptability and a more flexible personal adherence to norms of respectability? Hopes for economic prosperity and accompanied upward mobility that brought settlers to New Zealand could have had impact on women's behaviour, perhaps allowing them to take on work that they may have been less likely to do in Britain for example.<sup>61</sup> In Bessie Macready's second year in the colony she was offered 'entire charge' of a shop in Lyttelton but expressed mixed feelings: 'I accepted and was there for a year and a half and many a weary time I spent there, business dull, long hours, and innumerable little trials...However I was gaining something and that enabled me to bear up in prospect of a happier future.'<sup>62</sup> The tedium she expressed and the sense of 'trials' suggests that in terms of genteel respectability, shop keeping may have been a drop in status for her, although she was willing to do it for future rewards. The degree of adherence to the constraints of respectability depended on the individual, and women's social and economic position had impact on the choices they could make. Indeed 'respectable' work for one woman, may have been beyond the pale for another. Nevertheless, in the context of limited options for women who needed to earn a living, work that could be problematic for women's respectability may have offered social status and personal fulfillment as well as a livelihood. Lyttelton's hotels were significant in this respect.

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<sup>61</sup> James A. Hammerton, 'Gender and Migration', in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford 2004), p. 167. The author notes the possibilities of empowerment in emigration for women, for businesswomen as well as wives and mothers: 'migration could open up opportunities for women which approximate to conventional notions of the meaning of migration for men'. Women as well as men could aspire to the idea of 'getting on'.

<sup>62</sup> Bessie Macready to her cousins M. and Jane Down, quoted in Angela McCarthy, "'In Prospect of a Happier Future": Private Letters and Irish Women's Migration to New Zealand, 1840-1925', in *A Distant Shore: Irish Migration and New Zealand Settlement*, ed. Lyndon Fraser (Dunedin, 2000), p. 110.

## Hotelkeeping

As their appearance in civil litigation cases attests, female hotelkeepers in Lyttelton played a prominent role in the community, and it was in this occupation more than most others that the boundaries of respectability became blurred. As Diane Kirby put it '[r]espectability and unrespectability worked together to create the pub.'<sup>63</sup> In England women had a long history of involvement in taverns and alehouses, but hotels in the colonies developed along the lines of the new urban public houses in Britain.<sup>64</sup> A study of the role of women in the Lyttelton hotelkeeping trade has potential to reveal both the opportunities for women's self determination and the limits on women's freedoms in colonial New Zealand, but there is not scope to fully address that here. Sandra Quick's thesis on women in the liquor industry on the Otago goldfields between 1861 and 1901 drew on findings from Australian goldfields which argued that the 'definition of "respectable" required expansion on the goldfields when compared with English notions of female respectability.'<sup>65</sup> Women's role in the hotelkeeping trade was likely to have had a different character in Lyttelton, a settlement where respectability was important from the time of its founding, and which lacked the social disruptions characteristic of gold rush towns.

Historians have acknowledged the contradiction between the early nineteenth-century ideals of female respectability (with the emphasis on women as moral guardians) which might be expected to keep women out of the male space of the pub, and the reality that female hotelkeepers were doing a job particularly suited to their sex. The propriety of women running hotels was both asserted and refuted during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the colonies created opportunities and need for women to work in this role.<sup>66</sup> Clare Wright's recent work on the history of female hotelkeepers in Australia has tackled the myth that the Australian pub was a male space and revealed that instead of taking a marginal role women were often at the

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<sup>63</sup> Diane Kirby, *Barmaids: A History of Women's Work in Pubs* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 21.

<sup>64</sup> Changes in the physical layout of drinking establishments in the nineteenth century included the significant introduction of the bar counter, which created the need for the specialized bar attendant, and thus the female servant became the barmaid, *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>65</sup> Sandra Quick, "'The Colonial Helpmeet Takes a Dram': Women Participants in the Central Otago Goldfields Liquor Industry 1861-1901', MA thesis, University of Otago, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Kirby, p. 21.

forefront of hotelkeeping culture.<sup>67</sup> In many instances women's respectability and their involvement in the liquor trade were in no way mutually exclusive, and in fact authorities encouraged respectable women as proprietors of hotels because of the domestic qualities they could bring to it, such as respectability and maternal restraint.<sup>68</sup> Female hotelkeepers represented respectability through their restraint and self-possession, the order and cleanliness of their surroundings, and in their feminine authority as mother figures providing hospitality.<sup>69</sup> Wright claims 'female publicans upheld standards of decorum, decency and self-regard that owed their force to notions of respectable female behaviour' derived from Victorian gentility, and men were likely to respond to this moral policing, as having boundaries set by women harmed their pride less than male authority in this context.<sup>70</sup> However, the ambiguity of women's respectability in hotelkeeping was that they were moral examples, but could also be tainted by association with the liquor trade. Kirkby noted that some female hotelkeepers considered their occupation a drop in status; she wrote of a woman in a rural Australian pub who felt she had 'come down to it', and was embarrassed by her association with uncouth behaviour.<sup>71</sup> An examination of women's hotelkeeping in Lyttelton in terms of women's agency within the context of male dominated drinking-culture can throw light on the complexities and ambiguities of respectability and its significance in hotels.

In Lyttelton the Mitre Hotel was the first hotel to be established, followed not long after by the Lyttelton Arms in Canterbury Street, which, as this advertisement in 1851 attests, had a female proprietor:

Mrs W. Woods has resumed business at the "Lyttelton Arms," and respectfully informs Mechanics, Sawyers, Splitters, and Country Settlers, that every attention will be paid to their accommodation, and trusts by constantly keeping a supply of good liquors, beds and stabling at their service, to merit the support and patronage of a generous public.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Clare Wright, *Beyond the Ladies Lounge: Australia's Female Publicans* (Carlton, 2003). Her study of Victoria from convict period through to the twentieth century showed the significance of women's presence in this role. By 1876, after the gold rush and its impact on the liquor industry, in Melbourne 22 per cent of licensees were women, p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Sandra Quick found evidence of New Zealand attitudes claiming that widows could bring respectability to hotelkeeping, p. 207; Wright, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> Wright, pp. 157-158.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-189.

<sup>71</sup> Kirkby, p. 20.

<sup>72</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 14 June 1851, p. 1.

Domesticity was the key to the female role as hotelkeeper, and explains the claims for respectability of women involved in the trade.<sup>73</sup> It was an attractive occupation for women because it blurred the boundaries of public and private, social and spatial, and allowed women to have a visible and often powerful public role while doing work associated with the domestic sphere.<sup>74</sup>

Female hotelkeepers in Lyttelton were often the wives of the licensee, and if he was a respected businessman and prominent figure in the community, then they could expect to share in that status. Women involved in hotelkeeping as a family business were thus in a position to maintain their respectability, if not enhance it. Eleanor Olson arrived in Lyttelton in 1860 with her husband Frederick and their children (two sons from his previous marriage) and their work in the hotel trade contributed to their upward social mobility. After a spell of hotelkeeping in Lyttelton they pursued the same occupation on the West Coast goldfields, and their son Teddy eventually progressed to owning land in Taranaki.<sup>75</sup> In 1859 the Olsons left Wellington for Christchurch where Frederick tried his hand at a bootmaking business and Eleanor kept a boarding house. They took on the Canterbury Hotel in Lyttelton in March 1860, with hopes of better success. In a letter to her brother and sister-in-law in April 1860 Eleanor wrote: 'We have sold my house and firniture [sic] at Christchurch and Frederick have given up his trade for I will hope will be much better this Hotel.'<sup>76</sup> Women in successful partnership with their husbands could contribute to the respectability of a hotel by providing an example of happy domesticity and complementary roles. Eleanor represented her situation to her mother in a letter written from the Canterbury Hotel: 'I have maried [sic] again to one of the best of men. I do all I wish and have all I please. A few years older than myself with two sons, good young Men from 20 to 17...We are a very happy family never hear a disagreeable [sic] word spoken and Fred is all a wife could wish for.'<sup>77</sup>

However, a female hotelkeeper's lack of respectability, or the failings of a husband and wife hotelkeeping partnership were often very visible to the community, and a reminder to others of the potentially disreputable nature of the trade.

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<sup>73</sup> Wright argued that domesticity was the key component in the creation and organization of hotels in Australia, p. 103.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-106.

<sup>75</sup> Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland, 2003), p. 174.

<sup>76</sup> Eleanor Olson to her brother and sister-in-law, 30 April 1860, Olson Family Correspondence 1858-1860 MS-Papers-6420, ATL.

<sup>77</sup> Eleanor Olson to her mother, 30 April 1860.

Unrespectable behaviour for female hotelkeepers could include a failure to keep an 'orderly' house, permitting promiscuity or indulgence in drink. George Compton and his 'drunken wife' ran the Mitre intermittently during the 1850s until, when on the verge of bankruptcy in 1859, Compton hanged himself in his room at the hotel.<sup>78</sup> Mrs Compton's alcoholism continued after his death and a contemporary reminisced that she refused to give up possession of the hotel, with the eventual result that the hotel owners needed to lure her out by a strategically placed bottle of spirits on the footpath outside.<sup>79</sup> Disreputable landladies obviously existed and made it all the more important for respectable women in the trade to represent an unassailable good character.

Women had an important role in family run hotels. Men took on hotelkeeping to cement their social standing in the community, as well as for the business potential, as can be seen in the case of the Cameron family. In the 1860s the Cameron brothers operated several vessels in the coastal trade.<sup>80</sup> In addition, John and Peter Cameron had the lease for the Robin Hood Hotel from 1862 until 1871. Peter's wife Elizabeth helped him run the hotel until her death in 1868, and her daughter continued the role after her. The 1870 fire destroyed the Robin Hood, but from 1876 four Cameron sisters, Lizzie, Agnes, Ellen, and Margaret were involved in running the rebuilt Mitre Hotel.<sup>81</sup> The respectability of women of higher status families in the hotel trade in Lyttelton may have been maintained through an appearance of gentility, demonstrated through decorum, self-possession, smart but unpretentious dress and a ladylike demeanour. In the larger hotels publicans' wives could choose to be less visible by working behind the scenes supervising servants and looking after the accommodation side of the business. Newspaper reports of incidents at or in connection with Lyttelton hotels frequently revealed the presence of publican's wives, but with varying degrees of visibility. Some women served in the public bar, others were active behind the scenes. On the issue of illegally served drinks on a Sunday at the Railway and British Hotels in 1875, Mrs McQuilken had an active role in the bar, whereas Mrs Pierce's

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<sup>78</sup> Jenny Betts, *The Mitre Hotel: The Story of the Oldest Hotel in Canterbury* (Lyttelton, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> Baden Norris, *United to Protect: A History of Lyttelton's Waterfront Labour* (Christchurch, 1984), p. 7. Norris writes that they combined their two business interests in iniquitous fashion by requiring the 'lumpers' they employed on their vessels to drink in their hotel bar in the interests of future employment and while waiting to be paid, pp. 7-8.

<sup>81</sup> Betts, p. 17.

son served but she was not present.<sup>82</sup> When Mrs Warne, the manager of the Cambridge Hotel, appeared as witness in a larceny case that had occurred there, she said she had been serving in the bar.<sup>83</sup>

Generally, however, female licensees had no choice but to be visible and publicly active. Their role called for assertiveness and demanded they have authority over male behaviour, which was at odds with idealized femininity. A female hotelkeeper's respectability was equated with her ability to keep an orderly house, and this required power and authority. Respectability for female publicans was thus specific to their position and stretched the definitions of female respectability. It is significant that there is no evidence in Lyttelton at this time of unmarried women running pubs on their own behalf unless they were the daughters or sisters of the licensee; this illustrates the limits of what was acceptable. Women who ran hotels on their own account were most often widows, and some of these women left traces of their activities in civil court actions recorded in the *Plaint Books*. Between 1868 and 1893, eight women in civil cases can be identified as hotelkeepers. Some appear in a number of actions showing a career as a hotelkeeper that spanned a number of years; others made a single appearance. Mary Moynihan appeared first in 1876 as Licensee of the Crown Hotel, and appeared several times between 1879 and 1893 after which it appears she moved to Wellington.<sup>84</sup> Often these numerous actions were indicative of a successful business career and various property interests. However, Susan De Costa's venture into hotelkeeping was disastrous, ending in bankruptcy. In 1877 she was listed as 'fancy goods dealer'; but by mid 1878 she had taken on the British Hotel. During 1878 and 1879 she appeared in 24 actions, the majority as defendant, answering charges of unpaid wages and bills, from a range of Lyttelton businesses, including the butcher, grocer, draper, bootmaker, coal merchant, builder, and sodawater manufacturer.<sup>85</sup> After 1879 she disappears from the record.

Respectability, in terms of behaviour and effectively managing the hotel, was a quality expected of female hotelkeepers, even if it was sometimes doubted. Respectability helped to legitimate their position in a 'public' business role, and their tendency to keep orderly houses was stressed by the liquor industry, which benefited

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<sup>82</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 10 June 1875.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 July 1875.

<sup>84</sup> *Plaint Books*, 28 September 1876, 19 March 1879, 5 July 1882, 21 October 1885, 6 January 1886, 25 August 1886, 24 April 1888, 27 May 1891, 16 August 1893.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, see for example, 17 March 1877, 26 June 1878. Between November 1878 and May 1879 Susan De Costa averaged more than one civil action a month.

from women's presence.<sup>86</sup> A good reputation was the key to a woman gaining and keeping a licence, but 'given the customary associations between women, alcohol and disorder, it was probably more important that a female publican keep her nose clean',<sup>87</sup> by not permitting drunkenness, gambling, prostitution and after hours trading and by maintaining the same standards within bars expected of male publicans. Despite their legitimate public role, female hotelkeepers could never afford to be complacent about their respectability, as it was regularly assessed and judged at licensing meetings.

Widowhood was a legitimate route to hotelkeeping, but widows who took over the running of a successful and orderly hotel from a deceased spouse needed to keep the hotel running well to maintain their respectability. Mary Ann Beverley seems to have taken over the Saxon Hotel after her husband Abraham Beverley's death in 1873.<sup>88</sup> However, her efforts had attracted disapproval by the time of the annual licensing meeting in Lyttelton in June 1875, partly because she was a female keeping a bar, but also because it had been the site of crime and disorder. Police Sergeant-Major O'Grady called attention to 'bars being kept open by females, and at one he might mention that larcenies had occurred, and that more drunkenness prevailed than at those where the houses were conducted by men.'<sup>89</sup> He believed that 'females should not have the conducting of licensed houses, as a great deal of drinking took place in them'.<sup>90</sup> In his view, not only was women's association with alcohol inappropriate, they were less capable of keeping an orderly house than men. However, this was contrary to other claims that women hotelkeepers could be agents of control, and govern the behaviour of men in the public house, just as they did within the family home.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps confirming the Sergeant's concern, two weeks later Lydia Moudolosua was arrested for drunkenness after being found in a 'hopeless state of intoxication' in front of the Saxon Hotel, although she had blamed her state on having taken brandy for a bad cold.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Wright, p. 17.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>88</sup> Abraham Beverley died aged 45 in October 1873 and was recorded as a hotelkeeper and resident of Lyttelton. This was perhaps a recent career move as in 1871 at the time of his son's baptism he was recorded as a Railway Engineer. Church Register Index Card Catalogue, Christchurch Public Library.

<sup>89</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 2 June 1875.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 June 1875.

<sup>91</sup> Wright, p. 31.

<sup>92</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 16 June 1875.



Wright found that legal proceedings relating to female publicans in nineteenth-century Australia showed that judges did not view female licensees as transgressing boundaries; instead, they were primarily viewed as respectable businesswomen.<sup>93</sup> In Lyttelton there is evidence of police keeping a close eye on publicans' activities, and disapproval seems to have been directed frequently at female hotelkeepers. For example, in June 1880 Mary Moynihan appeared as a witness in a case concerning the theft of a piece of bacon from her premises, the Crown Hotel, as a result of a drunken bout by the two accused. The Bench 'spoke of the temptations offered to men to drink on Sunday by publicans leaving their back doors open. Under the circumstances they were disposed to take a lenient view of the matter, and trusted that it would serve as a warning to them.'<sup>94</sup> The case was discharged, no doubt leaving Mary Moynihan somewhat frustrated over the loss of the bacon. How far the unfavourable decision reflected disapproval of female publicans is impossible to say, but it is likely Mary Moynihan's involvement compounded the offence of after hours trading. In 1885, Mary Moynihan, now licensee of the Lyttelton Hotel, was one of two publicans charged with breach of the Licensing Act. She was fined 40 shillings and her license was endorsed 'for having drunken persons about her place between 11 and 12 pm'. The other charge was against Robert Grantham of the Royal Hotel, who was charged with keeping a barmaid in the bar after 11pm, and fined five pounds.<sup>95</sup> Like their male counterparts, female hotelkeepers were involved in after hours trading, but enforcement of liquor trade regulations by the authorities had more to do with issues of community order than female respectability.

Hotels were important institutions in the colonial context. Besides providing accommodation, they offered a number of services to the community ranging from hosting public meetings and inquests to providing newspapers, and the role of Lyttelton's female hotelkeepers gave them a respected and prominent position in the town. Sandra Quick found that on the Otago goldfields several female hotelkeepers ran reputable hotels and contributed to the community through charity and patronage.<sup>96</sup> There is evidence in Lyttelton that a female publican's role as businesswomen could extend to financial services and loans. In 1893 Emma Lodge, the licensee of the Crown Hotel, provided a loan of £2 money to an acquaintance,

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<sup>93</sup> Wright, p. 25.

<sup>94</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 12 June 1880, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 November 1885, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Quick, p. 45.

Sydney Newland Smith, but then took him to court when repayment did not come as promised. He was charged with obtaining money under false pretences and found guilty.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the prominence of women in Lyttelton's liquor trade it is possible that disapproval of female hotelkeepers became more a matter of concern as the town became settled, following the pattern of other colonial towns. On the goldfields, the more settled an area became the less acceptable it was for women to work in the public sphere of the hotel.<sup>98</sup> In Otago an increase in legal impediments between 1873 and 1881 made it more difficult for women to gain hotel licences, but there still existed a current of opinion in New Zealand that claimed women could bring respectability to hotelkeeping.<sup>99</sup> However, during the 1880s Temperance campaigners led a strong movement to remove women from hotels. In 1893 a law was passed forbidding single women to hold a publican's license, although this did not apply to widows.<sup>100</sup> Temperance advocates disliked the presence of women in bars, especially serving liquor. Nonetheless, in the 1890s there were still female hotelkeepers in Lyttelton, with Elizabeth Clark, Clara Demichelli, Agnes Madden and Mary Moynihan involved in civil actions between 1890 and 1893.

### **Barmaids**

Barmaids, more explicitly than female hotelkeepers, challenged the conventional understanding of women's respectability. Peter Bailey has claimed the barmaid was representative of a new cultural figure, expressive of what he terms parasexuality, 'sexuality that is deployed but contained', which placed the barmaid in the middle ground of sexuality between public and private, and between Madonna and whore.<sup>101</sup> The 'modern' barmaid came into existence in the new style urban public houses in London during the 1830s and was unique to Britain and the colonies of Australia and New Zealand.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>97</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 21 December 1893, p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Quick, p. 24.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

<sup>100</sup> Sue Upton, 'Barmaids and publicans: Researching a history of women in the liquor trade', *New Zealand Genealogist*, 32:269 (2001), p. 162-163.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Bailey, 'Parasexuality and Glamour: The Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype', in *Sexualities in History: A Reader*, eds. Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay (London, 2002), p. 222.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 224-226.

Lyttelton barmaids are less visible in the historical record than female publicans, but they too made a significant contribution to the liquor trade in the town. Though viewed as synonymous with prostitutes by some, and by the 1880s a target of Temperance reformers' agitation, being represented as 'sirens who lead men to drink',<sup>103</sup> the presence of barmaids in Lyttelton's hotels throughout the nineteenth century suggests the limits of strict notions of respectability in constraining some women's choices. As with female hotelkeepers, a barmaid's work was essentially an extension of domestic labour. Yet it was somewhat at odds with discourses of respectability, as the barmaid was 'simultaneously respectable as a woman battling to make her own way in the world yet suspiciously having too close a knowledge of too many men',<sup>104</sup> especially disreputable men. The work offered the advantages to women of a degree of freedom, with regular time off, good wages, and social contact with respectable men.<sup>105</sup> However, the interaction with males entailed a difficult negotiation of gendered boundaries, in terms of the degree of familiarity and the exposure to the male gaze and commentary. It is important not to underestimate the agency of individual Lyttelton women who, as barmaids, challenged notions of respectable employment and actively contributed to redefining conventional femininity.<sup>106</sup> Barmaids' self-identified respectability was probably more important than growing criticism from society's self-appointed moral guardians.

The divided views on the respectability or otherwise of barmaids suggests that women in this role in Lyttelton could easily fall either side of the respectable/unrespectable divide. As letters written to the *Lyttelton Times* in 1883 show, defenders of the respectability of barmaids drew on their own observations of respectable women in the trade. A detractor under the name 'Sobriety' had argued that even a virtuous female could not withstand the degradation of the bar:

Be it far from me to say no virtuous girl ever takes a situation as bargirl; I believe to the contrary – high wages tempt them; but I do contend that if their virtue is sufficiently easy to allow them to remain, they in all probability are lost to respectable society. Public bar life can in no way elevate female character. If they escape the lower grade of degradation they become at least loose in manner, low, coarse and vulgar in speech, and in most cases lovers of drink.

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<sup>103</sup> Upton, p. 162.

<sup>104</sup> Kirkby, p. 6.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 53. Kirkby notes that 'there were few other workplaces where men and women could mix together with this same freedom'.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 55

And if perchance they marry, what kind of wives do they make? And do not their progeny also carry with them through life the taint of the bar.<sup>107</sup>

However, ‘Critic’ responded that barmaids were often superior characters fit to marry the leaders of society:

I write merely as a man, and an Englishman, to defend the aspersions which an anonymous writer has, with the manliness peculiar to narrow minds, thrown on a class of women in our midst...I could point out to “Sobriety” ex-barmaids, wives of lawyers and other men holding good positions in many parts of the Colonies – ladies who take a front rank in society, and whose surroundings are perhaps sufficiently aristocratic to guard them from the intrusions of “Sobriety” ...<sup>108</sup>

The research done for this thesis has provided only a glimpse of Lyttelton barmaids, and further research is needed to reveal their experience more fully. Barmaids are notably absent from Lyttelton family histories and reminiscences. This is to be expected as family histories tend to be biased towards the families of status in a community. It is possible that, given the prejudices against them, women who had been barmaids were anxious to distance themselves from the association once they had married respectably, and thus the information was not preserved in family traditions.<sup>109</sup> By the early twentieth century agitation against barmaids had turned into legislation, which probably affected subsequent attitudes. The 1910 Barmaids Registration Act allowed women already working as barmaids to continue, but restricted women employed in hotels to the sisters, wives, and daughters of the licensee.<sup>110</sup> Despite the discourses that represented barmaids negatively as symbols of the evil liquor trade and objects of sexual titillation, the actual respectability or otherwise of barmaids was not so simple, especially if one considers the range of possible perspectives in terms of self definition, definition of barmaids as a group, and perceptions of them by observers from different backgrounds. Drinkers, teetotallers

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<sup>107</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 3 March 1883, p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 March 1883, p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> Family reminiscences often convey a sense that hotel work, of whatever kind, was not properly respectable work for women. Women of three generations of Alice Tyro’s family had worked in hotels. Of her sister’s work as a hotel cook sixty years ago she said ‘it was respectable by then’. She believed her Irish grandmother had worked as a hotel cook when she first arrived in Lyttelton, and her mother too had worked in hotels. Alice Tyro, interview with the author, 11 July 2005.

<sup>110</sup> Sandra Coney, ed. *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of New Zealand Women Since they Won the Vote* (Auckland, 1993), p. 128.

and the authorities viewed them from very different standpoints. It is probable that barmaids had their supporters in Lyttelton, considering the numbers of hotels in the town. What was written or said in their dispraise had probably less impact on attitudes in Lyttelton than the actual conduct and demeanour of resident Lyttelton barmaids, who were themselves responsible for defining their own respectability and making the occupation respectable for other women.

As an occupational category in Lyttelton, barmaids do not stand out as being in particularly disreputable in oral discourses or in documentary evidence. Barmaids are not prominent among women who came before the criminal courts. When visible in civil cases their actions are similar to those of other working women. In October 1874 the barmaid Emma Humphreys, took action against her employer over unpaid wages of £2 2s, and the case was found in her favour.<sup>111</sup> For working-class women the occupation of barmaid could be a route to enhanced status. Disreputable women were unlikely to be able to work as barmaids in well run hotels as the job required considerable personal qualities, such as a smart appearance, some education, and a respectable demeanour. For working-class women eager to better themselves it could be an attractive occupation, as barmaids were shown a degree of respect, represented by the title 'Miss'.<sup>112</sup> Women of sufficient strength of character could maintain a respectable subjective identity and present a respectable appearance despite challenging the boundaries of appropriate femininity, and working in an environment where they could be vulnerable. A careful choice of employer was one way barmaids could protect their respectability. It is possible that the respectability or otherwise of barmaids was linked also to the character of the hotel they worked in. An unanswerable question is the connection between barmaids and prostitution. The possible association between hotels and prostitution required a performance of ultra-respectability by respectable barmaids in order to protect their own reputations.

Independence and public visibility were characteristics that emerge in the fragmentary evidence of barmaids' lives in Lyttelton, and are characteristics not easily compatible with respectability for women. There is some evidence of frequent movement between different hotels, suggesting women actively sought change, whether for variety, or to better their circumstances. In 1885 Ellen Badger was a victim of theft on the day she packed up her belongings to move from her position as

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<sup>111</sup> *Plaint Books*, 15 October 1874.

<sup>112</sup> Kirkby, pp. 51, 96.

barmaid at the Mitre to barmaid at the Lyttelton Hotel.<sup>113</sup> Mary Moynihan ran the Lyttelton hotel at that time and, as a successful hotelkeeper, it was possible she was a desirable employer. The barmaid Alice Gray featured in the enquiry into the 1875 fire at the Mitre Hotel, and it was reported she had only been employed there for one week.<sup>114</sup> The not insignificant amount of dresses and jewellery that Alice Gray lost in the hotel fire is evocative of barmaids' need to present an attractive appearance in person and dress, an aspect of their occupation that could bring pleasure and self-respect. However, this could also potentially compromise their respectability in the perceptions of others. The requirement that barmaids be 'on show', as it were, to male customers meant they could be vulnerable to the advances of disreputable men. Emily Butler, a strikingly attractive barmaid at the Queens Hotel in the 1860s caught the eye of the notorious William Henry Hayes, known as 'Bully Hayes', a 'scoundrel' with a bad reputation, who married her despite having another two wives still living.<sup>115</sup>

The terminology used in advertisements for barmaids, with its overtones of a class hierarchy, revealed the uncertain respectability associated with the occupation. Advertisers often asked for a 'young person' but also demanded respectability as criteria, as in this advertisement from 1869: 'Wanted immediately, a respectable young person as Barmaid. References required. Liberal salary.'<sup>116</sup> This anxiety was not always apparent. The request could still be made in the simplest terms, for example when the advertiser wrote: 'Wanted, a Barmaid. Apply British Hotel, Lyttelton.'<sup>117</sup> Appearance and personal characteristics could be more important than respectability, as in 1880: 'Wanted, smart active Girl as Barmaid. Not necessary to have been in the bar before.'<sup>118</sup> However, the way barmaids sought work suggests that a concern with respectability and good character was always a consideration. A woman advertising in 1880 felt it necessary to stress her respectable status, not by using the word respectable but instead by referring to herself as a lady: 'Wanted by a young lady, Situation as Barmaid in a first class Hotel'.<sup>119</sup> The changing terminology represented by the increasing use of 'young lady' and its application to barmaids is

<sup>113</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 23 July 1885, p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 August 1875.

<sup>115</sup> Betts, pp. 12-13. Despite her husband's character, and predictions she would meet an untimely end, Emily appears to have prospered after her marriage. She lived in Samoa and later Australia where she died in 1914.

<sup>116</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 1 June 1869, p. 3.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 May 1890, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 June 1880 p. 1.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 February 1880 p. 1.

indicative of broadening definitions of gentility which could represent a gain in status for the occupation towards the end of the nineteenth century and a drive to assert respectability, despite the lobby of reformers who saw the barmaid as a serious social problem. In Britain by the 1890s there is evidence women from a higher social class were seeking positions as barmaids.<sup>120</sup>

### **Blurred Boundaries**

In the previous chapter women's unrespectable behaviour was shown to be often associated with public spaces and male dominated areas. Respectable women's actions could become problematic when they became public. Yet, in their public conduct they could self-consciously challenge what was seen as women's appropriate behaviour. By the later nineteenth century, new employment opportunities and changing legal rights were having some impact on women's lives. The interdisciplinary study of the industrial suburb of Caversham in southern Dunedin explored the performance and meaning of gender identities in different social settings. It found that gender was 'crucial yet contested' at the time, as femininity and masculinity were being redefined in response to significant social change.<sup>121</sup>

As has been shown in previous chapters there was no simple separation between port and town, public and private, respectable and unrespectable, and women's social interactions in the Lyttelton community crossed these social and spatial divisions. Women were not simply victims of the threatening male dominated spaces; their assertive public actions challenged the ideals of respectability. Women were affected by the increase in public disorder in the 1860s and 1870s, yet evidence suggests that women whose way of life brought them into contact with disreputable men could on occasion take action to defend themselves and their reputations. Women appeared as plaintiffs in court. In May 1875, for example, Isabella Williams charged James Kerr with assault, for which he was fined ten shillings.<sup>122</sup> Such cases did not always end favourably for the women involved. This could be potentially damaging for perceptions of their character, as in the case of Eliza O'Connor who charged George Budd with using abusive language, which was dismissed by the

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<sup>120</sup> Bailey, p. 232.

<sup>121</sup> Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law, 'Situating Gender', in Brookes, Cooper and Law, *Sites of Gender*, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 21 May 1875.

Bench.<sup>123</sup> Such cases suggest the women involved were not seen as respectable, since they arose out of confrontations with men. Isabella Williams is probably the same Mrs Williams who a few months later was reported to be a prostitute, and the mother of the neglected child Grace Isabella Williams.<sup>124</sup> However, cases like these can also reveal the extent to which respectability was a public performance, which could include behaviour that was ostensibly not respectable. Lyttelton working-class women's respectability was related to how they were regarded by people in their immediate neighbourhood. The public forum of the courts could be used to establish respectability or defend it from attack, and thereby maintain one's position in community hierarchies.<sup>125</sup> Although there could be risks in making potentially damaging private matters public, the readiness of some women to use the courts to settle disputes suggests that the action of publicly claiming and representing oneself as respectable in court could be a means of establishing respectability in the eyes of one's neighbours and the law. However Mrs Williams' case suggests her respectability may have been difficult to establish.

Women's disputes in Lyttelton were often played out in the street, or in doorways and boundaries of properties, so the matter may have been public knowledge before it came to court. Judgment was seldom made decisively for or against in such cases, leaving ambiguous the issue of the respectability of the parties involved. The court served as an arena for issues to be worked through, as illustrated by the Magistrate's response to a case in 1893. He stated that 'now the grievances had been discussed in open court they would probably die out' and dismissed the case.<sup>126</sup> In 1880 a family disagreement resulted in a public confrontation between two sisters in the street on New Year's night. Elizabeth Ann Treherne charged Grace Tredinnick with using 'Profane, Obscene and Abusive language'. The complainant stated that 'on New Year's night, when passing up Canterbury street, accused made use of very foul language towards her.'<sup>127</sup> After lengthy evidence of several witnesses including the defendant's husband and son, the Bench gave judgment to effect that 'they considered the matter was airing out of a family quarrel. It was plain that neither party could agree, and they advised them to avoid each other for the future, and dismissed the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 20 November 1875.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 5 November 1875. See Chapter 3.

<sup>125</sup> Women's use of the law to settle questions of status and reputation has had a long history, see Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, p. 30.

<sup>126</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 8 June 1893, p. 3.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 7 January 1880, p. 3.



case.’<sup>128</sup> Similarly, on 2 April 1880 Charles Ronsley was charged with assaulting Margaret Pearce on 30 March. ‘From the evidence it appeared that the parties were brother and sister, and the affair was a family quarrel. The Bench dismissed the charge after cautioning both parties.’<sup>129</sup> The extent to which such an airing of family quarrels compromised the respectability of those involved depended on the norms of their neighbours.

The close living conditions in the working-class community in Lyttelton contributed to women’s disputes. Dean Wilson argues that these forms of conflict were suggestive of a bonded community defending and defining its norms of behaviour.<sup>130</sup> Paradoxically, disputes between women helped to assert neighbourhood standards of respectable behaviour even while they challenged them. When women brought these disputes to court they were re-establishing norms of respectability and defending their own status. A few weeks after the New Year’s night incident involving Elizabeth Treherne and Grace Tredinnick, two women came to blows over the disputed possession of a bucket. Maria Garnet charged Kate Loughet with using abusive and threatening language towards her: ‘Complainant stated that the day in question defendant went to her house and abused her, and broke one of her windows. Defendant said that she went to complainant’s house for a bucket, which had been left there, when defendant complainant put her out and struck her with her fist.’<sup>131</sup> The Bench ordered the defendant to pay for the broken window ‘and ordered both parties to keep away from each other.’<sup>132</sup> When women verbally abused or assaulted each other their conduct challenged the boundaries of respectability, but such conduct did not necessarily prevent them claiming a self-identified respectability.

Such cases occurred even in the 1890s, which reveals their continued relevance for women as a way of enforcing community norms even as the era of migration ended and a more settled society developed. In September 1893 Mrs Clara Snow charged Mrs Toy with using insulting language towards her and asked for an order compelling her to keep the peace, while Mrs Toy brought an action of a similar nature against Mrs Snow. The newspaper reported: ‘From the evidence it appeared that the parties lived alongside of each other. For some little time past they have not

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 10 January 1880, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 3 April 1880, p. 3.

<sup>130</sup> Dean Wilson, ‘Community and Gender in Victorian Auckland’, *NZJH*, 30:1 (April 1996), p. 25.

<sup>131</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 31 January 1880, p. 3.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

been on the best of terms, trouble having arisen over the children'.<sup>133</sup> After a significant amount of evidence was heard, the case was dismissed. How women cared for their children was of significance for their standing in the community. Such actions could be a means of attempting to pay off old scores, as well as preventing future insults. However, issues of respectability were also at stake. Here there was an ambiguous respectability; much depended on reputation and perceptions.

These examples of community disputes show how forms of conflict could be evidence of shared norms. By the 1890s there appears to have been a strong sense of community operating in the port town. Oral discourses downplay religious and ethnic differences in Lyttelton and stress the collective identity of the community. However, ethnicity had a role to play in perceptions of women's respectability. The discussion of the ambiguous respectability of Lyttelton women would be incomplete without a consideration of the groups in New Zealand society most likely to be perceived as the disreputable 'other': the Catholic Irish and Māori. Throughout the nineteenth century, anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice existed in Canterbury.<sup>134</sup> Nonetheless, perceptions and representations of unrespectable Irish women in Lyttelton are not conspicuous in the sources used in this study. Similarly, Māori women could represent the racial 'other' against which white women's respectability was defined. Yet Māori women are also mostly invisible in the documentary sources used, although they appear, if fleetingly, in oral discourse. The presence of Māori women in Lyttelton in the nineteenth century is difficult to establish, but it seems they were not resident there. By the 1890s mixed descent individuals were present in the town. The census of 1891 reports three 'half caste males' and two 'half caste' females.<sup>135</sup>

Representations of Māori women feature in early twentieth-century reminiscences. Their occasional presence in the town was remembered: 'We did used to see some of the old women, sitting around and smoking pipes...They used to sit round in the gutter'.<sup>136</sup> These representations of Māori women as idle in the street suggest their perceived lack of respectability. However, a consideration of the nineteenth-century Māori community at Rapaki in Lyttelton Harbour provides a contrast to such representations. Although there are difficulties in applying European

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 7 September 1893, p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> Lyndon Fraser, *To Tara via Holyhead: Irish Catholic Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Christchurch* (Auckland, 1997), p. 60.

<sup>135</sup> *Census of New Zealand, 1891*.

<sup>136</sup> Myrtle Large, interviewed 10 December 1984, tape held at Lyttelton Public Library.

notions of respectability to Māori culture in the late nineteenth century, Māori women at Rapaki were adopting aspects of European culture, such as Christianity, that from a Pākehā perspective, could render them potentially more 'respectable'. The Wesleyan Methodist faith was important for the Rapaki community and the effect on women of intermarriage with Pākehā men, such as Kiti Paipeta's to the Englishman George William Arthur Couch in the late nineteenth century, could have been significant.<sup>137</sup> The impact of discourses of respectability on Māori women's subjectivities is however, difficult to assess.

This thesis has had to reconstruct details of women's lives from fragments of information, often from one moment in time. As a result, the women appear in suspended animation. Although respectability could be and was used like a definitive judgment, the changing circumstances of a woman's life could mean that her perceived respectability altered with her changing fortunes. A woman may have been obliged by hardships or misfortune to transgress the moral codes, but this was not necessarily a permanent state of things; a woman's circumstances could change considerably over the course of her life. Mrs Adams, who in the late nineteenth century took to prostitution in the face of financial trouble, had, it seems attained a position of some respectability later in life. She married in 1899, and is recorded in respectable guise as 'Widow, husband not heard of since 1889'.<sup>138</sup> Her situation in the second decade of the twentieth century is remembered: 'she had started taking women into her home that had children, that were pregnant, for childbirth, and she was spotlessly clean and always very well dressed, and she was...she liked herself.'<sup>139</sup>

Overall then, respectability could be ambiguous in terms of differing definitions and perspectives. Women could both claim respectability and challenge it at the same time. Ambiguities occurred in the context of women's activities in public spaces, but also in terms of how they represented themselves by contrast to their self-

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<sup>137</sup> George William Arthur Couch arrived in New Zealand in 1882. He was a Wesleyan Methodist lay preacher and conducted services at the church at Rapaki where he met Kiti Paipeta, the organist, Arthur (Hiwi) Couch, *Rapaki Remembered: history and reminiscence* (Lincoln and Christchurch, 1987), p. 55. For a discussion of the impact on Māori women of intermarriage with Pākehā men see Angela C. Wanhalla, 'Transgressing Boundaries: A History of the Mixed Descent Families of Maitapapa, Taieri, 1830-1940', PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 2004.

<sup>138</sup> Church Register Index Card Catalogue, Christchurch Public Library.

<sup>139</sup> Summerton, interview.

identity. In Lyttelton, as elsewhere, 'respectability remained an ambiguous concept and nobody had a certain prescription for its ingredients'.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> McConville, p. 439.

## Conclusion

When Elizabeth Carter and Sarah Buchanan posed for their photographs in nineteenth-century Lyttelton their sense of their respectability was an important aspect of how they represented themselves, and this outward show of respectability was recognizable as such to a contemporary observer. In similar fashion, this study has explored how the ideal of respectability as lived and experienced by women at the time existed as a continual interplay between the inward sense of their respectability and the outward demonstration of its qualities to others. As such, respectability was always about perspective, perception and context.

Women's gendered respectability in colonial Lyttelton was connected to their role as moral guardians and was specific to the context of a port town and a migrant community. Nevertheless, as a moral code, respectability in Lyttelton was related to and shared in the forms of a wider British culture. What is significant about the photographs of Elizabeth and Sarah is how little they appear to reflect a uniquely New Zealand or colonial form. They are comparable to photographs taken in Britain at the same time. Indeed photographs of women in colonial New Zealand often made the return journey to Britain, sent to family members for whom the representations of respectability, and the associated portrayal of success were immediately resonant.

As a cultural form, the concept of respectability was manifested in Lyttelton in similar ways to Britain, reflecting a shared cultural code. The core values of women's respectability included restraint, self-control, sobriety, cleanliness, sexual chastity, thrift, domesticity and religious observance. The ideals of respectability were emphasized in Lyttelton, as they were central to the aims of its founders. Respectable women were elevated to the status of co-founders as their presence was seen to ensure the morality of the new society. From a middle-class perspective, women's place in the home, their domesticity and role of 'helpmeet' were the main components of gendered respectability in colonial Lyttelton. Despite the potential of the colonial context for disrupting strict notions of women's appropriate behaviour, and the necessity for compromise and adaptability in the migrant community, the available evidence gives no indication that there was any significant relaxation of women's strict behavioural norms and hence a redefined sense of what could constitute female respectability. However, as a form of gendered behaviour respectability was a concept

in flux in the nineteenth century. Definitions of femininity were contested in the context of changing expectations of women's roles associated with their improving legal rights and expanding opportunities in employment and education. Such changes were both global in scale and observable on a local level. Discourses of respectability in Lyttelton were part of a wider imperial culture, illustrative of the links between metropole and colony and the significance changing conceptions of gender had as a force shaping empire, which are issues emphasized in recent scholarship.

Although part of larger cultural forces, the meanings and representations of respectability for women in Lyttelton were also specific to that particular context. The photographs evoke a common code, but as representations of particular women at a time and place, they highlight how respectability as a gendered norm of behaviour became meaningful within the day-to-day interactions of women's lives in specific social settings. Respectability for women in colonial Lyttelton was constructed and understood in relation to the discourses of threatening male-dominated public spaces characteristic of a port town. The community created a mental ordering of social and physical spaces reflecting the ideology of separate spheres and the public/private dichotomy. Women's respectability was seen to be maintained through the institution of marriage and by their necessary occupation of respectable domestic spaces, in contrast to the potential threat posed by disreputable men associated with the port and the ambiguous public spaces of the town. A concern with respectability was a unifying force in Lyttelton and important to the community's view of itself in the light of its loss of precedence to Christchurch and the anxiety about the impact of port activities. The community self-consciously policed the norms of respectable behaviour for women, with the respectability of its female population being seen to reflect the respectability of the community as a whole.

While Lyttelton women's respectability became meaningful in the context of community interactions and a shared cultural code, the meanings and representations of respectability in individual women's lives were specific to their particular circumstances and their own sense of self. However, the difficulty of addressing this through historical sources has been one of the challenges of this study, especially with regard to working-class women. While higher status women left direct representations through their writings, in most cases only indirect representations of working-class women survive and these are more frequently biased toward the disreputable and relate to transgressions. Close readings from a variety of sources have emphasized the

necessity of considering multiple perspectives in assessing meanings of respectability, but definitive interpretations of respectability in terms of women's subjectivities have not been possible. Analytical claims are necessarily modest and reflect my particular interpretation.

Respectability was represented in different ways depending on women's socio-economic position. While greater economic resources allowed some women to represent a higher status respectability that approximated to ideals of gentility, for working-class women respectability might be represented simply through sobriety and the work ethic. To be perceived to be respectable by others had practical value in women's lives but it is more difficult to assess how women's respectability worked in their sense of self. Women's representations, both direct and indirect, reflected self-conscious constructions of the respectable front for an observer. The paradox of representations of respectability was that they were a 'front' which could conceal aspects of women's subjectivities while simultaneously expressing their aspirations for respectability. In the photographs, Elizabeth and Sarah actively constructed their respectability and represented their own sense of their status while also showing conformity to dominant norms of the community.

Representations of respectability were constructed in relation to its opposite, the disreputable women who were unable or unwilling to demonstrate the respectable front. Women who lacked respectability in Lyttelton were those who were often drunk and disorderly and involved in prostitution and whose activities led to court appearances. The categorization of these women as 'bad' was related to how observers viewed them, and hence affects the constructions we make of them from historical sources where they are only represented by others; there are no photographs of these disreputable women from which we might gain another perspective. These women's transgressions were associated with a port subculture, relationships with unrespectable men and their occupation of male-dominated public spaces. However, there was room for ambiguity as degrees of adherence to respectability were complicated by perspective and context and tensions between dominant norms and norms of particular groups within the community. Women's respectability could be ambiguous, as their self-identified respectability might not match the perceptions of others. Ambiguous respectability was also related to the practical realities of women's lives in a port town. Women's activities in work or social interaction outside the home could constitute a blurring of the boundaries between public and private, and involve

a difficult negotiation of potentially unrespectable spaces. Ambiguity also occurred when the norm of marriage, which was supposed to ensure women's respectability, broke down. Husbands' alcoholism, abuse or failure to provide could harm the respectability of their wives.

By exploring the relationship between a gendered norm of behaviour and its meanings and workings in a particular place, this study has been able to recover aspects of women's lives in Lyttelton. Adherence to respectability put constraints on women's choices and actions but women were not simply passive victims of repression and restriction. Discourses of respectability were defined, policed, reworked and contested by women. By addressing respectability in terms of those within the dominant norms and those who stood outside them, as well as the uneasy territory in between, this thesis has addressed women's lives across the class spectrum. Through close readings of a variety of texts and representations, the diversity and complexity of Lyttelton women's 'experience' in the past is revealed. However, while this approach has included a focus on the potential of change over time in meanings of respectability, conclusions about this are tentative. It has been easier to assess how respectability worked in women's lives in terms of a particular episode or time of life, but more difficult to assess over a longer time period. The focus on particular texts has given static representations. While the readings of the photographs of Elizabeth and Sarah were given added depth by additional information known about them, the material on other women used in this study is mostly fragmentary and lacks a wider contextual background. Discourses of respectability were changing during the nineteenth century and this potentially affected women's subjectivities in terms of their self-identified respectability as well as cultural representations of respectability. A better assessment of change might be gained from a biographical focus on particular women and their families, giving attention to change over the life course and also how women of different generations represented respectability. Attention to the Temperance movement in Lyttelton and women's involvement in the suffrage struggle may also be a way to address changing definitions of respectability.

This has been an exploratory study, as there was no obvious way to explore respectability in historical sources and no similar models in New Zealand historiography. Hence, the conclusion becomes a retrospective exercise, with considerations of gaps and limitations. An early choice was made that a detailed study



of women's religious practice in Lyttelton was too big a project and too narrow a focus for the intentions of this study. This thesis has only touched on the role of religion in women's respectable identity and there is much potential for further work. A focus on church congregations and church attendance would be valuable. Another significant gap is ethnicity. Despite the intentions and hopes to address ethnic diversity and its relevance in adherence to norms of respectability, the sources used were not sufficient in this respect. Lyttelton discourses of community and the associated norms of respectability featured a tendency to stress conformity and assimilation. The absence of diversity in the discourses is marked as the community appears to have downplayed ethnic diversity as well as religious divisions. Irish women were present in Lyttelton but do not stand out as obviously unrespectable. The silences on the potentially disreputable Catholic Irish in oral discourses as well as written sources suggests the importance of shared norms of respectability in Lyttelton, and the lack of a visible ethnic group. However, it could also reflect the tendency of the Lyttelton community to stress its harmony and solidarity. This area requires a larger study. The absence of Māori women in the sources provides another challenge in interpretation. Having said this, this study does demonstrate that respectability was a key concept and marker of social distinction in nineteenth-century Lyttelton and that the complexities of perspectives and perception require further examination in this context.

## APPENDIX

**Results of analysis of a sample of classified advertising in the *Lyttelton Times* (March and September 1863, 1873, 1883, 1893) examining the use of ‘respectable’ and alternative adjectives.**

### March 1863

#### Advertisements for women

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
	12	12

#### Women advertising themselves

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
5	4	9

#### Advertisements for women

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable young person
Domestic servant			2	5	1		
Barmaid							
Nurse or nursemaid					1		
Governess or teacher							
Laundress							
Cook				1	1		
Shopgirl or saleswoman							
Needlewoman or dressmaker				1			

#### Women advertising themselves

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable young person
Domestic servant	2				1		
Barmaid							
Nurse or nursemaid					1		1
Governess or teacher		3 ‘respectable references’ ‘highly respectable references’					
Laundress							
Cook	1						
Shopgirl or saleswoman							
Needlewoman or dressmaker							

## September 1863

### Advertisements for women

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
	5	5

### Women advertising themselves

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
2	4	6

### Advertisements for women

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable young person	Young woman
Domestic servant			1					
Barmaid					1			
Nurse or nursemaid								
Governess or teacher		1						
Laundress								
Cook			2					
Shopgirl or saleswoman								
Needlewoman or dressmaker								
Milliner								

### Women advertising themselves

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable young person	Young woman
Domestic servant	1				1			
Barmaid								
Nurse or nursemaid								
Governess or teacher		1 'respectable references'						
Laundress								
Cook						1		1
Shopgirl or saleswoman	1							
Needlewoman or dressmaker								
Milliner								

**March 1873**

## Advertisements for women

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
4	36	40

## Women advertising themselves

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
1	2	3

## Advertisements for women

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person
Domestic servant	2		10	7		
Barmaid						
Nurse or nursemaid	1		3	1	1	
Governess or teacher			3			
Laundress			1			
Cook				7		
Shopgirl or saleswoman			1			
Needlewoman or dressmaker						
Milliner	1			2		

## Women advertising themselves

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person
Domestic servant	1		2			
Barmaid						
Nurse or nursemaid						
Governess or teacher						
Laundress						
Cook						
Shopgirl or saleswoman						
Needlewoman or dressmaker						
Milliner						

## September 1873

### Advertisements for women

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
3	23	26

### Women advertising themselves

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
1	3	4

### Advertisements for women

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person
Domestic servant	1		8	4		
Barmaid						
Nurse or nursemaid	1		1		1	
Governess or teacher			1			
Laundress						
Cook	1		2	3		
Shopgirl or saleswoman				1		
Needlewoman or dressmaker			1	1		
Milliner						

### Women advertising themselves

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person
Domestic servant	1		1			
Barmaid						
Nurse or nursemaid						
Governess or teacher						
Laundress					1	
Cook						
Shopgirl or saleswoman		1				
Needlewoman or dressmaker						
Milliner						

**March 1883**

## Advertisements for women

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
5	42	47

## Women advertising themselves

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
1	20	21

## Advertisements for women

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable lady
Domestic servant	3		8	12			
Barmaid				1			
Nurse or nursemaid	1		1		1		
Governess or teacher or companion		1	9	3	1		
Laundress			1	1			
Cook	1		1	1			
Shopgirl or saleswoman							
Needlewoman or dressmaker				1			
Milliner							

## Women advertising themselves

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable lady
Domestic servant		2	1	1	1		2
Barmaid		1					
Nurse or nursemaid							
Governess or teacher or companion		6		1	1		
Laundress							
Cook							
Shopgirl or saleswoman		1				1	
Needlewoman or dressmaker			1	1			
Milliner				1			

## September 1883

### Advertisements for women

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
2	22	24

### Women advertising themselves

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
1	18	19

### Advertisements for women

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable lady
Domestics servant	2	1	3	5			
Barmaid		1					
Nurse or nursemaid			2				
Governess or teacher or companion		1	4		1		
Laundress							
Cook			1				
Shopgirl or saleswoman				1	1		
Needlewoman or dressmaker				1			
Milliner							

### Women advertising themselves

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable lady
Domestic servant	1	2	1	1			
Barmaid		1					
Nurse or nursemaid						1	
Governess or teacher or companion		7			1		
Laundress							
Cook				1			
Shopgirl or saleswoman		1					
Needlewoman or dressmaker				2			
Milliner							

**March 1893**

## Advertisements for women

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
1	29	30

## Women advertising themselves

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
2	12	14

## Advertisements for women

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable lady
Domestic servant	1		4	10			
Barmaid				1			
Nurse or nursemaid			1				
Governess or teacher or companion			1				
Laundress							
Cook				1			
Shopgirl or saleswoman		3					
Needlewoman or dressmakers		1	1	2			
Milliners				3			
Machinist				1		1	

## Women advertising themselves

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable lady
Domestic servant	2		2			1	
Barmaid		1					
Nurse or nursemaid							
Governess or teacher or companion		2	3				
Laundress							
Cook							
Shopgirl or saleswoman						1	
Needlewoman or dressmaker			1				
Milliner							
Machinist							



## September 1893

### Advertisements for women

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
	20	20

### Women advertising themselves

Respectable used	Respectable not used	Total no. of advertisements
2	8	10

### Advertisements for women

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable lady
Domestics servant			5	7			
Barmaid							
Nurse or nursemaid				1			
Governess or teacher or companion		1	3				
Laundress							
Cook							
Shopgirl or saleswoman							
Needlewoman or dressmaker			1	2			
Milliner							
Machinist							

### Women advertising themselves

	Respectable	Lady	No adjective	Alternative adjective	Experienced	Young person	Respectable lady
Domestic servant	2		1	2			
Barmaid							
Nurse or nursemaid			1				
Governess or teacher or companion			2				
Laundress							
Cook							
Shopgirl or saleswoman		1					
Needlewoman or dressmaker					1		
Milliner							
Machinist							

**1863**

'Respectable' used:

March

Advertisements for women	0%
Women advertising	55.5%

September

Advertisements for women	0%
Women advertising	33.3%

1863 overall

Advertisements for women	0%
Women advertising	46.6%

1863 - Use of word 'respectable' in both advertisements for women, and women advertising themselves in two month sample: 21.8%

**1873**

'Respectable' used:

March

Advertisements for women	10%
Women advertising	33.3%

September

Advertisements for women	11.5%
Women advertising	25%

1873 overall

Advertisements for women	10.6%
Women advertising	28.6%

1873 - Use of word 'respectable' in both advertisements for women, and women advertising themselves in two month sample: 12.3%

**1883**

'Respectable' used:

March

Advertisements for women	10.6%
Women advertising	4.8%

September

Advertisements for women	8.3%
Women advertising	5.3%

1883 overall

Advertisements for women	9.9%
Women advertising	5%

1883 - Use of word 'respectable' in both advertisements for women, and women advertising themselves in two month sample: 8.1%

**1893**

'Respectable' used:

March

Advertisements for women	3.3%
Women advertising	14.3%

September

Advertisements for women	0%
Women advertising	20%

1893 overall

Advertisements for women	2%
Women advertising	16.7%

1893 - Use of word 'respectable' in both advertisements for women, and women advertising themselves in two month sample: 6.8%

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